



# 1 Thessalonians

## Christian Conduct & The Lord's Return

1 Thessalonians 5:25–28

November 20, 2013

### Introduction

Our study of 1 Thessalonians has come to a close, but there are still some interesting points to examine. As with the preceding verses, these may seem somewhat cobbled together; but we would still do well to heed what they say.

### **Concluding Thoughts (5:25–28)**

In Paul's concluding thoughts, he gives three imperative commands, and closes with a benediction.

#### A Request for Prayer (v. 25)

Paul begins this verse by assuming his audience is saved. "Brethren" indicates that these people have been born again into God's family. It is also an important consideration given the following command. When we ask others to pray for us, we should be aware that not every person we meet is on "praying ground." If God is to hear a person's prayers, the first prerequisite is that a person be a born-again believer. God does not honor the prayers of the wicked! (Prov 15:29; 1 Peter 3:12)

Note: He does honor one prayer of the wicked — the sinner's prayer of repentance to receive salvation!

Nevertheless, even believers must be in good standing with the Lord if they are to be on praying ground. This does not mean living a life of sinless perfection. But it does mean living with others in a peaceable and understanding way (1 Peter 3:7) and being willing to humbly confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

Once we have met the prerequisites to prayer, we should consider the content of Paul's request: pray for us. The "us" in this passage refers to Paul's missionary team: himself, Silvanus, and Timothy (cf. 1:1). As an apostle and missionary, Paul was sent to fulfill the Great Commission by preaching the gospel and planting new churches. This was not an easy

work and often involved spiritual opposition, and persecution. If Paul and his team were to succeed, they needed God’s help. This could only be accomplished through the prayers of the saints. But we must also ask ourselves, “What was the content of these prayers?” Paul does not specify this in the text, but presumably this is an all-inclusive statement. In other words, there is no matter too trivial to not bring before the Lord in prayer. Whether Paul was dealing with persecutions, health struggles, ministry challenges, financial difficulties, interpersonal issues, or even trivial day to day matters — whatever the case, he asked for prayer. The same should go for us today. We need to be in prayer for one another if we desire to see the Lord’s hand at work amongst us. God can still work in spite of our lack of prayers. But if we want to see Him do great and mighty things in and through us, then we need to be on our knees.

#### The Sending of Greetings (v. 26)

The second command involves the sending of greetings. Greeting others with a kiss was a formal mode of greeting in Jewish and ancient near eastern culture. This custom is also spoken of in several other places in the New Testament (Luke 7:45; 22:48; Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Pet 5:14). This brings us to the issue of the cultural acceptability of this practice. Why don’t we follow this command today? To be fair, some Christians still do practice this in modern Middle-Eastern contexts. But in Western culture, this has been replaced by a handshake or a hug.

When we encounter a situation like this in the Bible, where there is a question of cultural relevance, we should honestly ask the following three questions to help avoid any confusion:

What is the principle taught? For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:3–16, the principle is that women are to subject to the authority of men in the context of the local church.

What is the application of that principle? In the above example, women were to keep their heads covered as a symbol of that submission to authority. However, this symbolism was specific to first century Roman culture. Those who chose to uncover their heads were visibly showing a sign of rebellion. But today that cultural association no longer exists. Godly women who are submissive often go about with their heads uncovered.

How is the principle grounded? The issue of submission to authority is grounded in the submission of Jesus Christ to God the Father (1 Cor 11:3). Some evangelical Christians come to passages like this and draw the conclusion that the principle cannot be detached from the application, and therefore *both* must be thrown out. But that is where we need to be careful in distinguishing the two. Biblical principles are timeless and *always* relevant. However, the cultural applications of those principles may change.

With regard to greeting with a holy kiss, the principle appears to be simply that a greeting should happen. The “holy kiss” is the first century application of that principle. What we need to do is ask ourselves, “How do we contextualize this principle in our modern culture?” Think about this: when you gather with other believers, are you the kind of person who likes to be an anonymous “fly on the wall” or are you actively greeting other people? You might be surprised at how far a simple greeting can go to encourage another person and make them feel welcome, loved, and cared for.

#### The Command to Read the Epistle (v. 27)

The third command in the conclusion is that the Scriptures are to be read to all believers. This book has relevance for all Christians — not only those in Thessalonica, but everywhere! On this point, many Protestant Christians emphasize the availability of the Scriptures to all people. Any restrictions placed on the availability of the Bible in the language of the common people — whether by an individual or an institution — is entirely unbiblical. God wants people to read His word. In fact, because this was such an important issue, King Charlemagne (A.D. 742–814) instituted a new system of schools for the common people so they could be educated enough to read the Bible. This was the origin of our modern educational system in Western culture.

In any church today, we should be devoted to reading the Scriptures (1 Tim 4:13; Col 4:16; Eph 3:4). In the first century church, they would copy and share letters until the point where the entire New Testament was collected. Today this task has been completed for us. We should also notice that churches should have the Bible as their primary reading and teaching tool. Many churches today have taken a liking to reading other books about the Bible, to the extent that the Scriptures are never

read directly. This is dangerous! We need to be reading and applying the Bible directly in our own lives. Notice the following references to the reading of Scripture *in* Scripture:

- A) Moses read the law to the people (Exod 24:7).
- B) Joshua read the law to the people (Josh 8:34–35).
- C) Israeli kings were required to hand copy the law and read it (Deut 17:18–19).
- D) Josiah’s scribes found the law and read it to him (2 Kings 22:10–11; 2 Chron 34:8ff).
- E) Josiah read the law to the people (2 Kings 23:2; 2 Chron 34:30).
- F) Ezra read the law to the people (Neh 8:3ff; 13:1).
- G) The psalmists extol their love for the written word (Psalm 1; 119).
- H) Daniel read the prophets (Dan 9:2).
- I) Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for not knowing the Scriptures. They should have read and understood what He was talking about (Matt 12:3; et. al.).
- J) Jesus read the Scriptures in the synagogue (Luke 14:6). This was a normal synagogue practice (Acts 13:27; 15:21; 2 Cor 3:15).
- K) The Ethiopian eunuch was reading Isaiah (Acts 8:28).
- L) Philip was sent to help the eunuch understand what he was reading (Acts 8:28ff).

The Benediction (v. 28)

Paul ends his letter with a benediction, calling upon the Lord that He would send His grace to be with His people. This is a typical way for Paul to end many of his letters. It is not some trite closing statement. The Lord Jesus Christ is full of grace and truth (John 1:14) and furthermore, grace and truth *came* by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Without God’s grace, we would be hopelessly lost and frustrated. Grace not only is not only the foundation of our salvation, sanctification, and glorification, but it is the beginning and end of everything!

### **Conclusion**

Paul has given us a lot to chew on in this letter. Christ is indeed coming back to resurrect and glorify every believer. But until that time we need to be about His business, living each day according to His word. God’s calling in salvation is indeed a high calling; but it is a prime example of His grace toward us. So let’s live for Him!

~AWB