

THE MODEL CHURCH: A STRONG LOVE

1 THESSALONIANS 03:11–13

Introduction

The greatest virtue in the world is love. This is the one possession that man must have if he is to have an abundant life. Without love man is nothing. Paul knew this; therefore, he went before God and prayed that the Thessalonian church and its believers might grow in love more and more. The model church will be a church that has a strong love.

- I. Paul's great prayer (v. 11).
- II. The great need: love (v. 12).
- III. The great result of love (v. 13).

I. *1 Thessalonians 03:11 Prayer for the Thessalonian Church*

This is Paul's great prayer for the Thessalonian church and its believers.

1. Note to whom Paul prays. This is a power-packed point. Paul prays to both God and Christ, and in so doing, he reveals who God is and who Christ is.
 - a. Paul prays to *God Himself*: the Supreme and Majestic Being of the universe, the Supreme Intelligence, the Creator and Maker of all things, the Giver and Sustainer of life and of everything else, the Person who dwells everywhere in perfect and supreme power, knowledge and being.

Note that this is the picture of God that some men think about when they think of God. They think of a God who is in the heavens — in outer space someplace — a God who rules and reigns but is somewhat removed and not too interested in man. The point is this: Paul reveals that God is what some men think: supreme, majestic, ruling and reigning. But note the next point: God is more, much more.
 - b. Paul prays to God *our Father*. God is a Father to us, intimately involved in our lives. He is not just in outer space ruling and reigning and being far removed from us. God our Father is right here with us; He is actively participating in our lives just as an earthly father participates in the lives of his children. Therefore Paul, as a child, approaches God our Father and asks Him for certain things; and when he asks, he knows that his Father will hear and answer. He knows because God is not only able to answer, but God is his Father.
 - c. Paul prays to our Lord Jesus Christ. He prays...
 - *to our Lord*, the Supreme Majestic Ruler of the universe who has existed eternally in heaven and who loves us enough to become *our Lord*.
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- to our Lord Jesus, the Lord from heaven who loved us enough to come to earth in the person of Jesus, the Jewish carpenter from Nazareth. The Lord Jesus who was the promised Messiah and Saviour of the world.

The point is this: Paul revealed that God Himself is our Father and that Jesus the Lord Himself is the Lord God from heaven — that both the Father and the Son have the nature of God; therefore, both have co-existed eternally. For this reason, Paul prayed both to God our Father and to our Lord Jesus.

2. Paul asked the Father and the Lord Jesus to direct and guide his way to the Thessalonians. He wanted both God and the Lord Jesus working to open the door for him to return to the dear believers at Thessalonica. Remember: Satan had created some terrible problems and obstacles to keep Paul from returning to the church (1 Th. 2:18; 3:7). But he longed to return; therefore, he wanted both the Father and Son working on the matter. Hence, he addressed the request to both.

II. *1 Thessalonians 03:12 Prayer for the Great Need: Love*

The great need for which Paul prayed is the supreme need of every believer — the need for love, to grow in love more and more.

=> The word “increase” (pleonasai) means to abound, to multiply over and over.

=> The word “overflow” (perisseusai) means to excel and overflow (Amplified New Testament).

As stated, the great need is to grow in love — to abound and multiply — to excel and overflow in love. But note the crucial point: the love being spoken about is not what the world means by love. This is seen in two significant points.

1. The love that we must grow in is the love that makes us love *everyone*, not just one another. Note the verse: May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else. The love we are to have is the love that *reaches out* and *overflows* and *multiplies* toward everyone. This means...

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| • the unattractive | • the diseased | • the orphan |
| • the spiteful | • the sick | • the oppressor |
| • the hateful | • the poor | • the enemy |
| • the unclothed | • the murderer | • the widow and widower |
| • the unclean | • the sinner | • the homeless |
| • the opponent | • the prisoner | • the dictator |

How in the world can we love some of these people? How can we abound in love for them? How is it possible to love those who do evil to us and who treat us as enemies?

Is it even practical to ask us to love everyone? Is it even humanly possible? No! It is not possible for us to love those who hate us and who stand as enemies against us — not humanly possible. But there is a way. However, there is only one way. This is the subject of the next point.

2. The source of love is the Lord. There is no other source, not for the kind of love that can love everyone. This is the reason Paul went before the Lord and requested such a love. Paul knew that it was impossible for him or the Thessalonians to work up the kind of love that could reach out and abound toward everyone. A love that could love those who ignore, neglect, abuse and shamefully treat us could only come from God. Note this: there are four kinds of love, the last of which is *agape love*, the very love of God Himself. It is this love that enables us to love *all men*. Agape love — the love that *Loves all men* — is the kind of love that is to flood our hearts and lives — the kind of love that is to flow out toward every person no matter who they are (see *Love*, 1 Th. 3:12).

Mat 22:39 *And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'*

John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John. 15:12 “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

Rom 12:9 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

1 Th 3:12 *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.*

Heb 13:1 *Keep on loving each other as brothers.*

James 2:8 *If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing right.*

1 Pet 1:22 *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

1 John 4:7 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.*

1 THESSALONIANS 03:12 LOVE

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 1 Thessalonians 3:12

The kind of love which the believer is to have for all people is *agape love*, the great love of God Himself. *Agape love* is the great love that God holds for His own dear Son.

John 15:10 “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”

John 17:26 “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

The meaning of *agape love* is more clearly seen by contrasting it with the various kinds of love. There are essentially four kinds of love. Whereas the English language has only one word for *love* to describe all the affectionate experiences of men, the Greek language had a different word to describe each kind of love or affectionate experience.

1. There is *passionate love* or *eros love*. This is the physical love between sexes; the patriotic love of a person for his nation; the ambition of a person for power, wealth or fame. Briefly stated, *eros love* is the base love of a man that arises from his own inner passion. Sometimes *eros love* is focused upon good and other times it is focused upon bad. It should be noted that *eros love* is never used in the New Testament.
2. There is *affectionate love* or *storge love*. This is the kind of love that exists between parent and child and between loyal citizens and a trustworthy ruler. *Storge love* is also not used in the New Testament.
3. There is an *endearing love* or *phileo love*. *Phileo love* is the love of a husband and wife for each other, of a brother for a brother, of a friend for the dearest of friends. It is the love that cherishes, that holds someone or something ever so dear to one’s heart.
4. There is *selfless and sacrificial love* or *agape love*. *Agape love* is the love of the mind, of the reason, of the will. It is the love that goes so far...
 - that it loves a person even if he does not deserve to be loved.
 - that it actually loves the person who is utterly unworthy of being loved.

Note four significant points about *agape love*.

- a. Selfless or *agape love* is the love of God, the very love possessed by God Himself. It is the love demonstrated in the cross of Christ.

=> It is the love of God for the *ungodly*.

Rom 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

=> It is the love of God for *unworthy sinners*.

Rom 5:08-10 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

=> It is the love of God for *undeserving enemies*.

Rom 5:10 *For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

- b. Selfless or agape love is a gift of God. It can be experienced only if a person knows God *personally* — only if a person has received the love of God into his heart and life. Agape love has to be shed abroad (poured out, flooded, spread about) by the Spirit of God within the heart of a person.

Rom 5:5 *And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

- c. Selfless or agape love is the greatest thing in all of life according to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mark 12:29-31 *“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”*

- d. Selfless or agape love is the greatest possession and gift in human life according to the Scripture (1 Cor. 13:1-13).

1 Cor 13:13 *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. □*

III. 1 Thessalonians 03:13 The Great Result of Love

The great result of love is to be presented blameless before God when Christ returns to earth. This is the most glorious result imaginable. Note several striking facts.

1. The word “strengthen” (*sterixai*) means to prop, support, confirm, fix, make fast, set. Note: it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who strengthens our hearts before God. No one else has the right or power to set us before God; no one else can make us acceptable to God. (Note: the word heart here refers to the whole person or personality of man.)

2. The word “blameless” (amemptous) means to be free from fault and blame; to be free from all charges (Vine). The word “holy” (hagiosune) means to be set apart and separated to God. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who can make our hearts blameless and holy before God. He alone can free us from the faults and charges of sin; He alone can present us blameless and holy before God. Just think about it: Who else has such power? Do you know such a person? The thinking and honest person has to answer no. And to be honest, if Christ does not have the righteousness and power to present us blameless before God, then we are hopelessly doomed. Why? Because He is the only Person who has ever risen from the dead to never die again and to live eternally with God. If He is not our Saviour, then we shall die and never arise, never live with God. Man’s only hope is Christ — that He truthfully has the righteousness and power to set us blameless and holy before God.
3. When is this glorious presentation to God going to take place? When Christ returns with all His saints, that is, with all the “holy and glorified people of God” (Vincent). When Christ returns, He will present all believers — every single one of us — to God:
=> all the believers who have died and gone to be with the Lord.
=> all the believers who are ruptured when He returns.

What a coronation, the glorious day of our presentation before God — meeting Him face to face and being presented to Him blameless and holy — to be with Him forever and ever! “When our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones!” It is the promise of God Himself and therefore it cannot be stopped! And no man should want to stop it. On the contrary, all men should prepare and welcome it. (See notes, 1 Th. 4:13-5:3.)

John 14:2-3 *“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*

Phil 3:20 *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Col 3:4 *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

1 Pet 5:4 *And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*

1 John 3:2 *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ■*