

## Prayers

### To God

*Pray to let the Lord your God guide you this day through the decisions you must take and the work you must do. Trust Him, and wait for the guidance of His Spirit - it will come and you do not want to miss it.*

### For myself

I praise You, Lord God, for the beauty I see all around me. I praise You for people's varied characters, for fascinating conversations and for the help we give each other. I praise You for the beauty I see in the world around me, in nature and science and the amazing achievements of the human spirit. May I always see the beauty all around me, and through it all, find You. **AMEN**

### For others

*Pray about the water that comes into your own house. Pray for those who must fetch water for drinking and for washing. Let your prayers reflect the truth about the availability of water throughout the world and the inequalities with which we live*

## Meditation

Jesus,

Your birth was foretold by kings and prophets;  
And accepted by those who could hear Your voice.

Your teaching took the old and made it anew;  
And was understood by those who kept close to You.

Your power to heal changed the lives of the sick;  
And You commissioned Your disciples to do the same.

Your mercy was given to both men and women;  
And all those You met were treated with equality.

Your death was a tragedy of evil and misjudgement;  
And You bled for our sins without cursing our souls.

Your resurrection frightened those first in Your tomb;  
And yet this is now our greatest joy and salvation.

You ascended to the Father to release Your Spirit,  
And we have been blessed by Your gifts and graces.

You have done everything according to Your Father's will;

Alleluia!

# Bible Passage

## 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

<sup>23</sup> May He who is the God of peace purify you completely; and may your spirit, soul and body be wholly blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

<sup>25</sup> Fellow believers, pray for us. <sup>26</sup> Greet all the believers with a holy kiss.

<sup>27</sup> I put you under oath in the Lord to have this letter read to them all.

<sup>28</sup> May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you

## Review

We now come to the end of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian church. As a whole, it speaks engagingly about the issues faced by this new church; Paul encourages the fellowship in their persecution (1:5f. 3:3f.), he commends them for keeping to the true Gospel (1:9f.) and for preaching it to others (3:17f.). In addition, Paul conveys some important messages about the moral witness of God's people (4:1-8) and the doctrine of Christ's return (4:13-18, 51f.). He then encourages the faithful (5:12-22) before bringing the letter to a close.

### ***The closing of the letter***

In future letters (e.g. Romans), Paul developed the habit of closing his letters with some personal comments to his Christian friends at the church concerned, but there is none of this here. He concludes with warm greetings to the whole church, not just to his close friends.

Verses 23 and 24 of this passage stands as a formal blessing for God's people, for use at the end of worship. These verses call on God to complete His work in His people (5:23f.) and prepare them 'blameless' for His return! Following this, Paul urges the Thessalonian believers to persist in the vital task of prayer (5:25) and maintaining true fellowship (5:26). Then, perceiving the power of the medium he is using, he urges that the letter be read to all concerned (5:27). This is important, for when God leads His servants to communicate the truth of His Word, it must not be put to one side but passed on to all.

### ***The new medium of letter writing (5:27)***

Paul began his ministry at a time when it was just possible for letters to be sent from one part of the Roman Empire to another, and survive the process intact! Whilst there is literature surviving from earlier times, such as court documents revealing the affairs of kings, it is only from around the first century AD that common letters exist showing people communicating about what was important to them at the time. We may feel that God left it late to reveal His Messiah, with Israel waiting for centuries for the coming of their long promised Lord. However, God sent Jesus at the right time for the Gospel could be communicated accurately across the world, with documentation that would last. Paul's letters and the Gospels, together with other 'New Testament' writings are the record of the Gospel according to the apostles, and to this day, it is neglected at our peril.

In this context, on sentence stands out, and it is verse 27. Here, Paul places the Thessalonians under a stern obligation to read the letter to the whole church! Paul had not written this for the private consumption of leaders or teachers; he wanted the whole Body of Christ in Thessalonica to engage with everything he had written!

### ***The God of peace (5:23)***

The phrases used by Paul here are powerful. The phrase '*God of peace*' is well known, but it may surprise you to know that it is only found in five places in the New Testament (Rom

15:33, 16:20, Phil 4:9, here, and Heb 13:20). This wonderful description reminds us that God always works towards harmony, resolution, reconciliation, salvation and wholeness. Indeed, all these words express the great Hebrew word, '*shalom*' used here by Paul. So in the midst of life's tensions, when our gaze is drawn towards strife and condemnation, then this Scriptural confirmation of the true character of God should divert our spiritual eyes to look again at Him who is '*peace*', and who as Jesus, died and rose again for our '*shalom*', or '*salvation*', our '*peace with God*' (Rom 5:1) and the resolution of all our conflicts.

### **God's blessing of 'body, soul and spirit' (5:23,24)**

Adding to this, Paul rejoices in the day when those he speaks to will be '*blameless at the coming of our Lord*' (5:23). Moreover, he speaks of each person as '*spirit, soul and body*' (2:23). How quickly we read over very important things! These terms are used from creation onwards to describe the people God has made (see Genesis 2:7), yet most would find it hard to tell the difference between a person's '*soul*' and '*spirit*'! I know that most have an understanding of what a physical '*body*' is, even if we are unsure about emotions, feelings and intelligence! What then is the best way to understand the difference between the '*soul*' and the '*spirit*', as referred to in the Bible?

The Bible uses the term '*soul*' to mean the complete human being, made up of physical bits '*the dust of the earth*' (Genesis 2:7), which has been breathed into by God's breath, or '*Spirit*'. God's Spirit therefore enlivens our spirit and makes each one of us self conscious and spiritually aware of each other and also of God. So our '*soul*' means simply 'everything that makes a human being'. In a similar way, our '*spirit*' is that which by the grace and mercy of God marks us out as spiritual beings separate from everything else in Creation.

This is not just mere words; research them to find out for yourself what other religions make of them. You will find yourself embroiled in a philosophical, social and religious mess! Just remember, the whole Bible uses the collective term '*body soul and spirit*', to mean everything that makes an individual person created and loved by God, whom the Father longs to save! What a precious way of describing people, and how wonderful that God will save all who turn to Him. As Paul puts it here, He is consistently faithful to His Word, '*He will do it!*'

### **Prayers, a kiss, and 'the grace' (5:25-28)**

Paul's letter begins with a prayerful greeting (1:2f.), so by finishing with a prayer request, Paul has come full circle. True Christian fellowship is found in prayer, so Paul concludes by asking the Thessalonians to pray for him (5:5). The idea of shared prayer is very important. It is a blessing to ordinary Christians because it enables them to share their concerns and engage with each other in love and friendship. It also delights the Father, because within such prayer the soul is united with the Father as well as other believers, as He so often asks of us (John 17:11f.).

It seems natural that Paul should now ask the Thessalonians to share the 'holy kiss', a more formal greeting than merely the sharing of words. We do not know for sure exactly what was meant by this 'kiss', but it probably meant a greeting in the form of a brief 'kiss on the cheek', which is not uncommon today. When shared in fellowship, this physical contact, which has no sexual connotations, symbolises the spiritual unity of those who are 'in Christ'. Paul uses the expression at the end of several letters (Rom 16:16, 1 Cor 16:20, 2 Cor 13:12, see also 1 Peter 5:14).

After Paul's last comment about the obligation to read the letter (5:27 - see above), his final comment returns to the '*grace*' of God. This word means the favour, blessing and good will of God towards people which lies at the heart of His power to save us. Thank God that within our Creator lies a generous and magnanimous heart towards us all, even if we have wandered away from Him! It is surely right to conclude a letter such as this by giving thanks to God for His grace!

# Application

## ***God's call to purify***

Verse 23 calls on God's people to be purified by God! I am not sure many of us who attend church each Sunday have it in mind that we are being purified by God for a purpose! We may even need to be reminded that this purification is necessary so that God can come again to claim His Bride, prepared for the End Times.

This passage reminds us that we are being prepared for a greater glory of God, a greater grace that He wants to pour out on us, and that His faithfulness is extreme, because it is far greater than ours, or that of any church or organisation! We need these reminders because we so often become entrapped in our self satisfaction at our achievements and our contentedness at what we believe we are doing for God, at least in our formal work. Paul's words blow away the presumptions of human religion that creep into the life of faith, and draw us back to such things as the grace of God, the purifying love of the Father and the fellowship of believers by which the church grows and become the witness God requires of it.

It is my personal conviction that where God's people are collectively aware of their need for their Lord, that they live and behave as if God is both their judge and the lover, and that they pray in unprejudiced favour towards who need the help of God, then the Gospel becomes self evident and the witness of the truth about God will break out in revival. Leaders are a by-product of revival, they are not its leaders; God is the author of His works and the One who makes '*all things work together for good*' (Rom 8:28).

## ***Being at peace with God***

I find it heart warming to be reminded that God's intention is to enable me to be at peace with Him. I sometimes hear preachers who give me the impression that faith is all about people making the right decisions, and although I understand that I have some obligations here, surely the evidence is that God has worked incredibly hard to deliver salvation. He is working even now, and we who are His servants must listen to His voice so that we can help His efforts on behalf of others.

## ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. Pray for the people you meet on a daily basis, and for their peace. If the Lord is touching their lives, then be ready to do the Lord's will and help them.
2. Discuss the concept of 'body', 'soul', and 'spirit' in your group, and help each other with those parts that seem difficult.
3. Does letter writing still have a place in the lives of people today, or has it been replaced by email, text, or other forms of communication? How may we use modern means for God's purposes?

## **Final Prayer**

This day, Lord God, is Your precious gift. We ask You to keep us from falling and fulfil Your purposes in us each day and throughout our lives. Bring us to the end of the day rejoicing, and may we be glad to be Your servants, who praise You throughout everything we do and say. AMEN