

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

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[0 : 00] Of those who profess to follow Christ by looking at the prayers he mentions in four other epistles. 1 Corinthians chapter 13, the first part of verse 7.

But we pray to God that you may not do wrong. Colossians chapter 1, verse 9 and following. And so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy. And then in 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 11 and following.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you.

[1 : 26] So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. And then in chapter 5, verse 23.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we see here in our text, 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 11 and 12. This very pointed prayer of Paul's that the Thessalonian believers would be holy.

And this is the very work that God works in us for the glory of his name. And so it is sensible. It's very reasonable that as Christian people, we should make resolutions.

We should make promises that we would change to be more and more like Christ. Again to Jonathan Edwards' preamble.

[2 : 25] He says, Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these resolutions. And here's the phrase for you to hear at this point.

So far as they are agreeable to his will for Christ's sake. What is it God's will for us? That we would be holy as he is holy.

If you do take the time to look at Edwards' resolves, you will see that they are aimed at his character. They're aimed at his personal habits that lead to holiness.

That they're aimed at his relationships. That they would be honoring to God in all things. And they're aimed at his service. How it is that he believes, the Bible teaches, that he's called to love the world around him.

So, as we make resolutions, we should firstly resolve to be holy. Secondly, we should resolve dependently.

[3 : 27] Dependently. You are powerless to change yourself in any meaningful way. But God is all-powerful. And desires to change you into the image of his son.

This is why Paul so readily prays for the church. He knows that only God brings about meaningful change. This is his concern for them.

That they would be more like Christ. And so what does he do? He prays. Verse 11. To this end, we always pray for you. That our God may make you holy.

And then in verse 12. According to the grace of our God and the Lord, Jesus Christ. Paul knew full well that the power to change comes from God.

He wrote in Philippians chapter 2, verse 12 and 13. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now. Not only as in my presence. But much more in my absence. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

[4 : 34] For it is God who works in you. Both to will and to work. For his good pleasure. Meaningful change takes effort on our part.

And it requires the grace of God. If we resolve to be holy. If we resolve to be holy, we can have confidence that God will work in our working toward that great end.

Our sanctification, hear this carefully, is synergistic. We do not come to God on our own. But we follow God in partnership with him.

If you set your mind to being holy, you must recognize that that very setting is a gift. It's a grace to you from God. But if you decide, such and such must change with me.

Let's say, I need to do better in this next year at taking up and reading the word. Do not expect to be animated by God out of bed. This will not happen.

[5 : 40] You will not be moved out of body, out of your bed and to your desk and to the scriptures to turn the light on and to begin reading. You're going to have to swing your legs out of bed and let them hit the floor.

Walk to your desk and open the text and put your face down to the text. All along recognizing this is God's grace to you and pleading his further grace as you meet with him in the Bible.

Again, to Edwards preamble. He says, being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help. I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these resolutions.

So just as Paul prayed for the Thessalonian believers and just as Edwards prayed for himself, we should resolve dependently, looking to God for the grace necessary to change for his glory.

So resolve to be holy, resolve dependently. And thirdly, resolve for the glory of Christ. Why did Paul want to see the Thessalonian believers grow in holiness?

[7 : 00] Not simply for their sake, although they do benefit from such growth. But we see in the beginning of verse 12, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you.

That people would behold the Thessalonian believers and they would praise the name of Christ. Resolutions aimed at making you a better you miss the mark.

When your end goal is your glory and not the glory of Christ, in your intention you have made yourself a God and bowed before a paltry throne.

A resolution to be more healthy, for example, falls short if it is merely for your image. It is aimed properly when you want to be healthy to give yourself in service to others.

When you want your mind to be sharper because you're eating more healthy. I joked earlier about eating less sugar during the Christmas season. I hope in some measure my trying to be strict in my diet has allowed me to be here this morning.

[8 : 09] I'm not stricken with some illness. That's not to say that everybody who's stricken with illness this morning ate sugar. They may or may not. But these types of resolutions aimed at ourselves are missing the point.

But these types of resolutions aimed at the glory of God are just what we are expected to do. Samuel Rutherford, Puritan pastor, once said this on your bulletin.

Build your nest upon no tree here, for you see God has sold the forest to death. Everything that we do as Christian people ought to be aimed at the hereafter.

It ought to be about the praise of Christ in this world and forevermore. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 31. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, fit in there.

Whatever resolution you make, do all to the glory of God. And in Colossians 3, verse 17. And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

[9 : 21] It is the high calling and the greatest joy of the Christian to know God and to make him known. This is what our lives are meant for.

And this is what change should be meant for. Peter wrote in 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 9 and following. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

This is what we were made and then remade for the glory of Christ. Again, in Edwards' preamble. [10 : 37] Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these resolutions so far as they are agreeable to his will for Christ's sake.

So we should resolve. We should resolve. We should resolve to be holy. In making resolutions, we should do so dependently.

And we should do so for the glory of Christ. So in conclusion, I'd like to ask you seven questions for the sake of application.

Three points and seven questions. It might be the perfect sermon. If you don't know me, I'm kidding. Number one.

What about you most needs to change? What about you most needs to change? What sins seem to ensnare you most often?

[11 : 41] Having been set free from them, they have no power over you any longer. What are those sins that seem to recur and come back again and again?

What habits do you neglect? The good graces that have been given to you. What of those habits do you neglect? Do you read your Bible enough?

Do you pray enough? Are you regularly sharing the gospel? Do you work hard at whatever work it is that God has given to you?

Do you rest well? All of the commands of God to us are good. Do you believe that? The things that are commanded to us should not be a duty to us, but rather a delight.

And yes, they take work. Yes, there's effort involved in it. Anything good in this world involves effort and toil. Do you believe that it's for your good that these things have been commanded of us?

[12 : 45] So what about you most needs to change? Secondly, why would you like to change? Recognize something about you needs changing and it does.

Why would you like to change? Why would you like to change? Is your desire aimed too low at your glory that people would like you more, think you more attractive, more successful?

Or is it aimed at God's glory? Is it aimed at the praise of Christ in this world and the world hereafter? Is your desire for change for God's glory and your good in Christ?

Thirdly, how are you going to change? How are you going to change? What is the plan? I think that too many of us have really, really good intentions for change.

We have good desires for change, but we never make any plan to change whatsoever. Big, broad, platitude types of changes, right?

[13 : 53] I need to study God's word more next year. What I'm asking you is, how? What are you going to do? What's the plan? Set it forth. Write it down on paper.

Ask somebody to hold you accountable to the effort that you're going to put into such a change. I can promise you this. Some of you are young, I know.

All of the good things in life, the things that need accomplishing, must be planned for. I'm finding more and more and more that if I don't put it on the calendar, it's not going to happen. And there's all types of wonderful things, right, that I ought to be doing with my life that belong on the calendar, right?

So that I can block out the silly things that fill up so much of our time. So if you're recognizing your need for change and you know what that thing is, what is the plan to change?

Fourth, what is most likely to prevent your change? What is most likely to prevent your change? It's probable that the thing you think you need to most work on is the thing you've tried to work on in the past and have failed to do so.

[15 : 02] What circumstance needs to change in order for you to change? Some of you just need to go to bed earlier, right? Your schedule just needs to change.

Some of you need to hang out with different friends. Have you failed to change so many times in the past that you are afraid to even try?

You need to believe again that change is possible. That God works change in people. That apart from him you will fail, but in him the right type of change aimed at holiness for his glory, he will work in you to bring about such change.

So what is most likely to prevent your change? Fifthly, what truths do you need to believe in order to change? Here's a couple of examples. Church, many of you believe in penance and not repentance.

You think that you must do certain things to punish yourselves when you sin. And you find yourself just sitting in like the miry bog all the time.

[16:19] Feeling bad for yourself because you're just not good enough. You're not. And you never will be. But Christ is enough. We're not saved by our merit.

We're saved by his merit, right? He was perfect. That's why he came to be a man. He had to fulfill the law. He had to live the life that we could not live. Stop thinking you have to earn your way to God.

If you have found yourself before him, oh foolish Christ family churchians, having begun by the spirit, why do you think you're being perfected by the flesh? You can't be.

There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Yes, you have failed. Pick up and run again. God has given us much grace for this.

It's a wonderful reality of the gospel. Every other religion puts God on top of a mountain and says, good luck climbing up to him. Here's how you get there. Our religion says God came down off the mountain to us.

[17:22] What a wonderful truth. This is. There's therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Another Philippians chapter one, verse six.

Paul writes to Philippian church, and I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. I think many of you feel discouraged in your pursuit of holiness.

You find yourself bumping your head against the exact same wall again and again. And you need to be reminded that God is zealous for his glory.

He has a people that he saved for that purpose. And we will not be perfect this side of heaven. But if you're in Christ, he is moving you progressively in that direction.

If you are taking up the charge that's been given to you, he is so very ready to provide the grace for all that he has commanded that we would do.

[18:25] There's a massive amount of freedom to know that I can try, that I can make good and solid effort to live a life that is pleasing to God, and that he will provide for me the grace necessary by the power of his spirit to do that very thing.

So fifth, what truths do you need to believe in order to change? There's many others that could be inserted there. Sixth, are you committed to change?

Are you committed to change? Change will take work on your part. It always does. Hard things take effort. It's going to take work on your part, right?

We dehabituate by rehabilitating. Building new habits takes effort. It takes time. You're going to have to do some things to accomplish this.

This is a really simple example, but I know for a fact that every morning when I put on my shoes, I put on my right shoe first. I don't know why I put on my right shoe first, but I do. The left shoe could be closer to me.

[19:26] I'm still going to go get the right shoe first and put on my right shoe first. It just feels right to do such a thing. Well, what if for some bizarre reason I was convinced that I really ought to put the left shoe on first?

This would be the better thing for me. This would be the glory of God for some strange reason, that I put my left shoe on first. It would take effort on my part to do so.

I'm going to be really quick, apt, without even thinking about it, to put on my right shoe first. I'm going to have to do some things. I'm going to have to write myself reminders. I'm going to have to recite a poem in my head over and over again about how much more important the left shoe is than the right shoe in the morning.

I'm going to have to position the left shoe. It's going to have to be obnoxious. I'm going to have to stick my left shoe into my right shoe. I'm going to have to get it out first. There's things I'm going to have to do. I'm going to have to make effort, real effort.

And I know this is true in my life, and I know that it's true in yours. Those of you, we spend time together, we counsel, we do things, is that many of you really want to change, but you make little to no effort to do it.

[20:29] You do little to no work to actually see change happen in your life. So are you committed to it? Are you actually ready to do the work it's going to take for your good and for the glory of Christ?

And lastly, how can the church help you change? God has saved a people that we would live together for the glory of God.

And you may need to reach out and ask for help. I need help changing. Praise God he's also given to the church elders. And I have a group of men that I am accountable to and ask for prayer and say to them, this is a thing that must change.

Hold me accountable to this thing. How can the church help you to change? Let's pray together. Let's pray together.