

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb 10:23-25)

... *and may complete what is lacking in your faith?* – Paul’s great desire is to help disciple the believers in the Thessalonian community so that they might grow and mature in the faith and in so doing, to learn how to serve each other and thus to be a catalyst for spiritual growth among all who are members of the community.

Here we see clearly that while evangelism, i.e., the giving of the gospel message, is all important, there is more that must be done to assure a constant “growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Yeshua Messiah.” For the enemy of our souls has given himself to persuade those who profess faith in Yeshua that there is no need for them to think they need any further commitments or growth in becoming more and more like Yeshua. Peter gives this admonition in his second epistle:

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Yeshua Messiah. Amen. (2Pet 3:17–18)

11 Now may our God and Father Himself and Yeshua our Lord direct our way to you;

The Greek text opens with $\delta\epsilon$ (*de*) which often carries an “adversative force,” marking a contrast with the immediate preceding context. Here, however, it marks a transition, marking Paul’s prayers. We find the same usage in 5:23 and in 2Thess 2:16; 3:5, 16). This particular usage indicates that Paul is not transcribing an actual prayer for the Thessalonian believers but that he is expressing the core substance of his regular prayerful intercession on behalf of the Thessalonian community. According to some scholars, these words have a liturgical ring and may have been used in the common liturgy of the early followers of Yeshua.¹

Paul informs the Thessalonian community in 2:18 that he and his colleagues wanted to return to be with the Thessalonian community,

¹ See Malherbe, on 1Thess 3:11 in *The Anchor Bible*, p. 212.

but the work of the enemy, Satan, had hindered them from coming. In this opening phrase of v. 11, then, we see that Paul is waiting upon the Lord to “open the door” for their visit, and doubtlessly believing that such would take place by the powerful hand of God.

...*God and Father Himself and Yeshua our Lord direct our way to you* - It is most interesting to consider the verbiage Paul uses here. First, he refers to “our God and Father” (Αὐτὸς...ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ...ἡμῶν (*autos... ho theos kai patēr...haimōn*) and then to “Yeshua our Lord” (ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς (*ho kurios heimōn yēsous*) and most importantly, follows with a singular verb “direct” (κατευθύναι, *kateuthunai*), thus emphasizing that the Father and Yeshua are distinct yet, in the glorious mystery of it all, are infinitely One. Moreover, the sentence begins with the Greek Αὐτὸς (*autos*), meaning “Him” and in this context “Himself,” and is a singular pronoun, once again emphasizing both that there is only one true God Who is triune—Father, Son, and Spirit.

We see, then, that Paul emphasizes here the reality that God is the One Who is in control of all things, and Who brings about that which flows from His all-encompassing sovereign plan. Paul speaks to this in his epistle to the Romans, for there he proclaims that God brings about all of His holy will for those who are His, and if this is true, then He likewise is in full control of all aspects of life in our universe.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Rom 8:28)

Thus, let us heed the admonition of Paul in Ephesians:

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit... (Eph 6:18)

Here we see, once again, that the apostles chosen by God were enabled, by His grace and through their own spiritual dedication and growth, to live out the truth of the gospel they proclaimed and thereby to be examples of a genuine spiritual life in Yeshua. Surely Paul and his colleagues present themselves to us as those who considered prayer to be an essential and a regular reality for all who have been redeemed by God’s sovereign grace and love. May these inspired words of Scripture encourage us all the more to be diligent in prayer, following the example of Paul and even Yeshua Himself, to make prayer a constant practice in our daily lives. This Paul will also emphasize in the closing chapter of this epistle (5:17).

12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you;

The Greek text of this verse begins with the word “you” (ὁμᾶς, *humas*), which is a plural pronoun (i.e., “all of you”) thus giving strong emphasis that his message and admonition applies equally to all who are part of the Thessalonian believing community.

Paul’s desire for their community is that each person within the community would “increase” and “abound” in love for one another.”

These two words, *πλεονάζω* (*pleonazō*) and *περισεύω* (*perisseuō*), are essentially synonyms, with the first word, *pleonazō*, carrying the sense of “growth that produces an abundance.” The second word, *perisseuō*, used of persons, implies a wealth or overabundance of some possession or quality.¹

Note that Paul’s perspective is that the positive abundance of such love for each other within the local assembly of believers is the result of the Lord’s work. Yet we may ask, “How is it that the Lord accomplishes such “increase” and “abounding” in love for one another?” He does so through the work of the Ruach, bringing His people to live in obedience to the Scriptures. And in this specific case, Paul is referring to “loving one another” within the believing community. Thus, one of the most important aspects in gaining the ability to love one another, even with the same kind of love with which God loves us, is to be able to forgive each other when wrongs are committed, and to do so in the same manner in which God has forgiven us. Note Paul’s instructions to the community of believers in Ephesus.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Messiah also has forgiven you. (Eph 4:31-32)

We see, then, Paul’s desire for the Thessalonian community, a desire which would apply to all communities of faith since this is contained in the inspired scriptures, is that we learn to forgive those who have wronged us, and to do so in the same manner as God has forgiven us.

1 Michael Martin, *1Thess* in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 33 (B&H Pub., 1995), p. 112.

Excursus
The Path to Forgiving

A key biblical text dealing with forgiveness is Eph 4:31-32 as noted above. Just prior to these verses, Paul has admonished us not to let the sun go down on our anger and thus to give opportunity to the devil. Here, he summarizes the bitter, unforgiving spirit with a list of terms (v. 31) and gives the command to be kind, and thus to forgive (v. 32). It can readily be seen that those things listed in v. 31 stand in opposition to kindness and the exercise of forgiveness. Thus, learning to forgive first involves recognizing and “putting away” those things that impede forgiveness. Let’s look at each of the terms given in Eph 4:31.

Bitterness

(πικρία, *pikria*) Involves the use of the tongue. This is insulting speech, belittling someone, making light of someone, either to his face or behind his back.

Wrath

(θυμός, *thumos*) An outburst of anger; quick flare-up; loss of temper; immediate retaliation.

Anger

(ὀργή, *orge*) This is usually thought of as the “slow burn,” the silent treatment. The word tends to convey a contemplative revenge.

Clamor

(κραυγή, *krauge*) Arguing, “a lot of noise,” never letting the issue die; always bringing the matter up to the person’s attention; needing to have the last word.

Slander

(βλασφημία, *blasphemia*) Literally, “blasphemy,” degrading the character of someone; *lashon hara*.

Malice

(κακία, *kakia*) Literally “bad things,” and in this context, therefore, “bad feelings,” “wrong motives,” every other kind of selfish or bad relational behavior.

The first important step in “putting away” these sinful behaviors is to recognize that they are, in fact, sin. We cannot excuse these things as just the function of our personalities or temperaments. While each of us will struggle with some of these more than others, we all must admit that they are contrary to what God wants of us, and we must therefore

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commit ourselves to put them away from our lives. These descriptions of sinful behavior simply cannot characterize us.

Then the Apostle gives us the positive exhortation to kindness and forgiveness in v. 32. And in so doing, he gives us the supreme example to follow, that is, the manner in which God forgave us in Messiah Yeshua. In fact, the language he uses is instructive: "...forgiving each other, just as (*ὡς, hos*) God in Messiah has forgiven you." Our forgiveness is to be patterned after God's forgiveness. The way He forgives is the way we are to forgive. It will be instructive, then, to study briefly the character and method of God's forgiveness in Yeshua.

1. God forgave us totally of His grace, not for self gain.

God did not enrich Himself through forgiving us. On the contrary, forgiving us was very costly to Him. "For you know the grace of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (2Cor. 8:9). This is the very essence of love—a willingness to give without receiving. Selfish motives for extending forgiveness, or seeking it, betray a false forgiveness. Such feigned forgiveness is short-lived, and often breeds more strife.

2. God forgave us completely.

It is tempting to forgive in part and yet hold back a measure of the offense as a kind of advantage over the other person: "You still owe me because of what you did back then!" God doesn't remember our sins against us—He forgives them completely.

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions..." (Col. 2:13)

Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. (Is. 55:7)

3. God forgave us before we asked for forgiveness.

He forgave us when we did not deserve to be forgiven, even while we were still committing offenses against Him!

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us. (Rom 5:8)

4. God forgave us on the basis of Messiah's death

God did not forego His justice in order to forgive us. In other words, He didn't "sweep our sins under the carpet." Rather, He dealt with our sins by paying the penalty due to His justice. In this we learn that forgiveness is not antithetical to justice, but actually is the result of seeing justice served. Justice and forgiveness are two sides of the same coin.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Rom 5:10).

5. God's forgiveness is continual.

In 1John 1:9 we read: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The Greek text gives us a little more insight into the Apostle's teaching. The opening verb, "confess," (*ὁμολογῶμεν, homologomen*) is a present tense verb. We might translate it this way: "Whenever we confess our sins" That means that there is no limit to the number of times that we can come to God and ask for His forgiveness. And the verse goes on to say that whenever we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us. He is faithful, meaning He is always ready to forgive.

Peter asked Yeshua a very interesting question about forgiveness in Matt 18:21–22: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Yeshua said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." We should understand Yeshua's answer not as a concrete arithmetic number, as though when we have forgiven 490 times, that's enough! No, seventy times seven was a way of saying "Forgive, forgive again, and keep on forgiving." This is exactly the way that God forgives us. Whenever we genuinely seek forgiveness, He is faithful and righteous to assure us that He has forgiven us.

Thus, if we more and more gain the perspective that we are to forgive others even as God has forgiven us, we will be enabled by the power of the Ruach to love others in truth and in holiness. This means, of course, that we also may lovingly approach someone who has sinned against us and seek to have the wrong righted.

Thus, truly forgiving someone who has, in one way or another, sinned against oneself, ought to be the obvious fruit of truly experiencing the great gift of forgiveness granted to oneself by God Who has redeemed and granted the believer eternal life with Him. But we must also emphasize the fact that loving each other may also require that we confront a brother or sister in the Lord who has sinned, but we must do so with the ultimate goal of helping them see the path of repentance and the joy of being forgiven. In all of this, we must remain committed to extolling God as our Lord and Savior, and doing all to honor Him and the bounty of His gift of eternal salvation.

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...just as we also do for you; Paul adds this final phrase to v. 12, reminding the believers in Thessalonica that they were witnesses of the manner in which Paul and his colleagues expressed genuine love for them. For they had undergone significant struggles to come to them and likewise to teach them the truths of God and the salvation He had granted them through faith in Yeshua.

Here, once again, we see a fitting example that should be received by all who are placed into leadership roles in their local assemblies of believers. It must be the ultimate goal of all who are in leadership positions within the *ekklesia* of Yeshua, to always point people to Him and not to themselves. For our Savior Yeshua must have “first place” in all aspects of our lives, including our corporate lives in the local assembly of which we are members, as Paul teaches us in his epistle to the Colossians:

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (Col. 1:16-18)

13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

This is the ultimate goal of all true and maturing believers in Yeshua, that all who are His, purchased by His death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession would have it as their life goal to honor Him in everything and to give Him “first place” in all aspects of one’s life. Such a goal is sure for all who are truly born-again by saving faith. For when true believers stand before the Almighty in glory, they will finally be welcomed into the bliss of eternity, forever to dwell in the holy perfection of Yeshua Himself.

...to establish your hearts without blame in holiness – It seems quite clear that Paul has Zech 14:5 in mind as he pens these words. In the context of Zech 14, the prophet is surely prophesying regarding the manner in which the Lord will protect His own and enable them to escape devastating troubles and will be rescued by the very coming of the Almighty.

You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! (Zech 14:5)

But this final phrase of our verse, while surely looking forward to the ultimate goal of eternity with Yeshua, emphasizes that our redemption is not only with eternity in mind, but is the result of being made new in our current life upon this earth. All who are His have been granted both the desire and ability to honor Him even in this fallen world, and to live as sure examples of God’s power to redeem sinners.

...at the coming of our Lord Yeshua with all His saints. – In this context Paul simply speaks of “the coming” of Yeshua. The words “the coming” translate the Greek *παρουσία* (*parousia*). In using this term, it is not possible to determine the exact reference to which he is referring, for he adds “with all His saints.” This might imply that the resurrection has already occurred, but there are difficulties with that, for it would seem to undermine what Paul writes in 4:15–17, that believers living at the time of His return “meet Him in the air.” Yet our current verse has “with all His saints.” It seems that the best approach for our current text is to understand the term *parousia*, “the coming,” as viewing all aspects of the coming of Yeshua as one complete reality which brings to a close the history of the earth and gathers all His own to dwell forever with Him in eternity.