

Christ's grace directing and consoling the church (Quality: very good)

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[0 : 00] This afternoon I will, with the Lord's help, direct your thoughts to the second epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, the second chapter and the last two verses, the verses 16 and 17 in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

Now, our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God, even our Father, which hath loved us and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

These beautiful and prayerful desires the Apostle Paul writes to the believers at Thessalonica, but we know that he prayed in a similar vein, that richness of desire for all saints, and the word of God is left on record for us today and for all believers upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, I see no difficulty. We may apply it to all who truly love the Lord Jesus Christ, that there is this same desire and this provision for them.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in these two epistles for these reasons.

[2 : 27] For one thing, they were a church that had been quite recently formed. Many of them were new in the faith.

They had turned, he said, to God from idols. They had come from pagan backgrounds, from those strange and idolatrous practices, ways of sin in the world, and they had come to trust in the Saviour, to believe in the Gospel as it had been preached by the Apostles.

And they had been formed into a church, but things were difficult and they met with opposition. It was not easy to be a Christian.

In the first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul speaks of how concerned he was, how he had sent Timothy to see whether they had stood the test.

They, as he says, he met with opposition from his own countrymen, so they had met with that opposition and with persecution.

[3 : 52] He had told them, warned them. We find in the Acts of the Apostles that the believers were not left under a false impression.

They were not told like some today, well, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and all will be well and all your troubles will be gone forever. They were not told anything like that.

They were told of the way. We must, through much tribulation, enter into the Kingdom of God. The Apostles went back and they strengthened the churches and they exhorted them to cleave to the Lord with purpose of faith.

That they needed to be resolute. That they must stand. That there were those difficulties. That the devil was busy with the opposition.

And so the Thessalonians came into this. As Paul very well says in this chapter, that he had told them, as he says in the first epistle, we told you and it came to pass.

[5 : 11] He was glad that they had been steadfast. He was glad that they had endured.

What a relief it was when Timothy brought a good rapport back. Well, that is a pleasing thing. How pleasing to those who have concern for the Church of Christ when there is a good rapport.

What grief when those many fall away. What grief when there seems to be that slipping back.

What a sadness when those who have seemed to run well falter in the race. Well, this was one thing then that occasioned the epistle.

Another thing was that there seemed to be some erroneous views concerning the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 26] It would appear that there were those who were teaching that the Lord Jesus Christ was coming again so shortly that really people need not bother to do their daily work.

They should give up and just wait. And that was something of a spirit that had come into the Thessalonian Church.

And the apostle writes to correct that. Well, there are two errors. First, he points out that the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ would be preceded by various signs.

There were things that were to happen. He is in no way saying that we can know or predict the time or the day.

Don't you get me wrong. I do not mean that. Of course, there have been those who have, contrary to the Saviour's own word, tried to do that.

[7 : 47] 1914, wasn't it the one date that was said the world was going to end? And that has come and gone and so have other dates.

To put a date is plainly foolish. And contrary to our Saviour's word.

But the Thessalonians on the other side were deceived into thinking that it was so imminent that they would live to see that necessarily.

And because of this, there was a third way in which the apostle wrote to them.

And that was to point out to them that they should live that godly life. That they should be an example in the world to exhort them to that life of following the Lord Jesus Christ.

[8 : 59] As he puts it in this expression in verse 17 here. Establish you in every good word and work.

Whenever the Saviour will come, then it is by his own statements, his own inimitable words, necessary that we should be properly occupied.

Occupy till I come. That we should be doing those things that are right and pleasing in his sight. Blessed are those servants whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

The idea that we give up and do nothing and just wait is entirely contrary to the spirit of the gospel.

It is entirely contrary to that spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are exhorted then to be ready, to be watchful again, to be waiting, to be doing those things that are right in his sight, to be concerned, to live that life of faith, and to do that which is to his praise.

[10 : 43] These three things then together, the Apostle wrote about in these beautiful epistles.

So, in a sense, in the words of our text, he sums this up. He is saying that because of the troubles, because of the opposition, because of the state of the world, because of their own weakness and dependence, they will need this comfort.

They need the Lord to sustain them and to pour upon them of his grace. Don't we need that indeed?

Just a word in a sense. It's not an essential word to our text that I just move to think upon this fourth verse in the second chapter where Paul speaks of the man of sin, son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God.

In the days of the Puritans, the Reformers, it was common to think of this expression, the man of sin, as relating to the Pope.

[12 : 41] But today, that's largely gone out of fashion and even evangelical Christians say, well, no, it refers to someone yet to come.

Well, it may refer to someone yet to come, but I'm sure that they were right in putting that title to the Pope.

I'm sure that we've, in a sense, generally speaking, gone rather soft, haven't we, in our Protestantism?

Not that I'm just anti-Catholic, but really when you look back and when you consider those things that the Pope has appropriated to himself and the Roman Catholic Church has in its dogma given to the Pope, they are blasphemous indeed.

I remember a good man pointing out upon this word that when the Pope is crowned, a new Pope in St. Peter's in Rome, then he sits upon that chair, it's called Peter's chair, and he actually sits over the altar.

[14 : 15] And upon that altar in a box is put the host, as they call it, the consecrated wafer, which they allege to be the very body of the Lord Jesus Christ, God himself.

So when he sits there, he is elevated, he puts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, in a literal sense.

What a blasphemous thing, isn't it? When the Pope enunciated that doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, 1870 or thereabouts, I think it was, he spoke in authoritative terms, he used those words that are only the real province of the Lord Jesus Christ who said, I am the light of the world.

What blasphemy again. Here is a man appropriating to himself what belongs to God. well, there are many things that are really like that and the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church still puts the authoritative words of the Pope as of greater value and merit than the very word of God.

they have not in any way repealed that. They may in our country have softened their approach and I know there are Roman Catholics who read the Bible.

[16 : 31] That is true today. Well, thank God for that. Hopefully they may yet be brought to the light through that glorious means.

but the doctrine of their church remains the same sadly. Well, that is just a reflection upon the background of the word.

So, Paul prays for these believers. He desires for the church of Christ. The Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God even our Father which have loved us.

He speaks of the loving Saviour and he speaks of the love of God the Father and then he goes on to speak of lasting comfort of the lively hope and then of the life that is to be lived.

our Lord Jesus Christ himself. I join this with the expression God even our Father which hath loved us.

[17 : 55] I judge that he speaks of the love of both for indeed that is right isn't it? I and my Father are one says Jesus.

The Father which hath loved you he speaks to his disciples in this way he reminds them of that union the oneness those who are loved of the Father he loves those whom he loves the Father loves there can be no division no difference no contradiction a perfect unity so the Savior loves he loves well we know that is so at least I trust we do he loves I often think that is a very expressive word in John 13 where it is said Jesus having loved his own which were in the world loved them unto the end that love is demonstrated he loved them unto the end what was it that moved him to die for them what was it that brought him from the throne of heaven what was it that moved him to endure the cross and despise the shame was it not that love that love

God so loved the world and our saviour so loved so Paul could say as he writes to the Galatians he loved me and gave himself for me Christ loved the church and gave himself for it Paul writes in Ephesians 5 love moved him to die one writes and on this we rely the saviour has loved us we cannot tell why but we know that he has loved us loved us so much that he endured the cross he gave himself the love of Christ constrain us all has said oh that it were shed abroad sometimes we sing don't we hear that hymn of desire

God only knows the love of God oh that it now were shed abroad in this poor stony heart our Lord Jesus Christ which has loved us this is the great and the fundamental answer isn't it to objections or it may be said as I was thinking with you this morning we are unworthy yes we are we cannot claim that the Lord should take any notice of us why should he regard us like Mephibosheth said to David David sought him out would have kindness on him why should the king regard such a dead dog as

I am now that was an expression of desperate unworthiness a living dog wasn't counted very much they were just scavengers pestilential things tolerated but not desired a living dog was bad enough but a dead dog well consider it as a depth of unworthiness why did David do it David did it because he loved he loved Jonathan and he had sworn that love and he would carry out that love and he was determined to love and that's why he did it and isn't that the same with our Lord Jesus Christ it's not that we are worthy are we sinful yes we are but then he loves and he came to save sinners he came to deliver them he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance what moved him surely it was love cannot be that he likes sinners in that sense sin is abhorrent to him sin is dreadful how painful how wounding to his holy nature how abominable it's not that he loves sin but that he loves love sinners and so in every way we may say we don't deserve no of course we don't we can't pay but there is love you don't pay for love it's not reckoned in that way oh how he loves yea he loved the people so

[24 : 05] Moses said in that great song in Deuteronomy and that is a quite a typical thing because that people were rebellious they were not the greatest God reminds them how he set his love upon them not because they were deserving not because they were a noble nation not because he saw that they would be very charming and agreeable they were stiff necked Moses reminds them you've been you've been rebellious he said since the time that I knew you that was his estimation of them what a people and yet God loved them set his love upon them and continued in that love toward them God even our father which hath loved us well that is an everlasting love he loved chose us in that love set that love upon us

Paul as he writes to the Ephesians reminds them of this grand truth and how it was God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ and he speaks of that choice in love how according us in the first chapter and verse four according us he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love that great principle is that first principle because

God is love which hath loved us he has manifested that love in sending his only begotten son herein says John is love not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins I'm very fond of that word I think it is such an amazing word John John has said God is love that eternal principle that statement so infinite God is love yes but how do we know how do we understand how is it manifested he he would be love he is love whether mortal men realize it or not whether they know it or not but he has manifested that love he has shown it he has demonstrated that love in the person of his own dear son here in his love says

John we love him because he first loved us sent his son into the world that we might live through him this is love indeed and the manifestation of it which hath loved us and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace comfort your hearts love love love there is an agreement between these two words everlasting consolation and the comfort of the heart but there is this difference I see it in this way that when he speaks of that everlasting consolation he means that rest that remains he means that heavenly that heavenly bliss that perfect comfort of the heaven itself where we read of those who have no more pain no more sorrow and no more crying where the former things are passed away where there is no darkness where no sin in any way in any effect can enter in no uncleanness where there is that perfectness of life and praise and glory the likeness of the saviour where those redeemed enter into bliss absolutely everlasting consolation they shall obtain joy and gladness sorrow and sighing shall flee away the prophet puts it joy but that is the promise that is the inheritance that is laid up for the saints there is an inheritance laid up for them and we trust by his grace to enter in but what of the present life is there no comfort here yes there is says the apostle he prays for this comfort your hearts now comfort them in the present troubles there is that hope and expectation of everlasting consolation but there are

I think what the hymn writer describes doesn't he rules of comfort here below I think he puts it in that way which is quite a sweet way to put it those treasures above but rules of comfort here below the little streams that flow from that river of love he hath given us everlasting consolation there is that to look forward to that prize set before us that blessedness if so be says Paul as he writes to the Romans in chapter eight if so be that we suffer that we may be also glorified together I reckon he says the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us here he is making this assessment this great reckoning by faith contrasting the immortal and the mortal and mind you this was a man who had suffered and suffered we would say in a human sense considerably he is not saying it in a human sense because he doesn't know much about pain and weakness we might have dismissed it then like people who don't know much about a thing but are really ready to express their opinion and give you a treatise upon it but Paul isn't like that that's not so when you read the account when you see how he is forced to defend his apostleship when he writes to the

[33 : 02] Corinthians and he gives somewhat of a list of how he has suffered endured what he has passed through well that's not to be dismissed you can't say here's a man who doesn't know much about pain who hasn't had much to contend with who is only saying this because he's had a quiet life no he isn't saying it from that background at all he's saying it because because he has that great view of faith because he sees the contrast clearly because like those of old he has endured as seeing him who is invisible because like Moses he's chosen rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season for says the word concerning

Moses for he had respect to the recompense of the reward he had made that assessment too but a great thing then it is he has given us everlasting consolation oh that great hope that grand prospect that wonder that there is that bliss to enter into that rest in Christ Jesus that fulfillment of his promise God is unask you I believe suffered cruel torture died at the stake in the reign of

Henry VIII that unpredictable monarch godly woman and she was a well taught woman in every way and unusual for those days she was able to write receive education day when not many people could you know but she left on record she wrote her feelings from the prison cell she wrote a piece of verse and entitled it as one who was as merry as any on that way to heaven when she spoke used the word merry in those days it wouldn't mean you know joyous with enthusiasm not merry in that sense but in simply meant happy happy truly happy happy in her heart oh yes believe it was her who said when she was cruelly tortured on the rack who may make in my pain my tongue to complain that you will never make me to recant my faith a noble woman indeed who suffered unto death why why endure why go through why because of that which was set before her that hope of the everlasting consolation she had good hope through grace oh yes there is that comfort that everlasting comfort and then that lively hope as

Peter puts it that lively hope through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead hope good hope it is said we saved by hope Paul writes in Romans 8 that which we do not see but fasten upon as real true that which is set before us good hope through his grace grace oh the grace of God abundant grace sovereign grace saving grace free grace these adjectives to it abounding grace sufficient grace yes it is it is all that and more because that is just what we need through his grace his grace the grace of our

Lord as Paul was exceeding abundant his writing of his own conversion and how God had mercy upon him the chief of sinners the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus so he had good hope through the grace of God hope of entering in hope of enduring to the end hope of being like the saviour being absent from the body and present with the Lord what a good hope is the hope of the Christian founded upon the word of God I hope in thy word says David in the

[39 : 40] Psalms he hopes in the Lord he waits for that dawning of the day and he hopes in the word it is a sure foundation God cannot lie his word is true and faithful altogether so that is good hope we hope if we hope rightly hope in the Lord Jesus Christ he is our hope our hope we hope in him a good hope indeed through his grace is taught us so to hope we were without hope in the world Paul describes that condition in Ephesians chapter 2 without

God without hope in the world but here is hope hope in the Lord Jesus Christ hope in that great work that he has done in the cross of Christ in his precious blood and in that victory that he has gained and attested by his resurrection oh a good hope through grace so the apostle desires that the Lord may comfort your hearts comfort them now comfort is especially suitable for those who are in need or for those who are weak or for those who are wounded they need comfort that's obvious really but still

I put it before you because spiritually it does have a great application we don't talk of comforting those who are rich we don't talk of comforting those who are strong those who are healthy the word is not applicable to those is it don't talk about comforting them might envy them sometimes but comfort ah this is the province of those who are weak those who are weary those who are sorrowful those who are in trouble who are who are in people who are in 2 corinthians chapter 1 he speaks of the god of all comfort that in itself is very precious isn't it the god of all comfort who comfort us in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of god he sees the wonderful way in which god works by these means how he comforts comfort your hearts well we sang in our opening hymn about being weary they need those need comfort those who are spiritually weary and weak and wounded they need comfort and the lord speaks much of comfort in his word indeed that is really the cry of the gospel isn't it comfort ye comfort ye my people saith your god speak ye comfortably to jerusalem cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished her iniquity is pardon she hath received of the lord's hand double for all her sins notice there are those aspects her warfare she needs comfort because she had been in the conflict the battle she needs comfort because her sins have brought wounds they have rested with guilt upon the heart well this is a painful thing but still in the end it's not a bad thing is it how much worse it is to be indifferent to sin how much worse it is to be hardened to it it's not a nice thing is it to know that we are ill but it really is a worse thing to think you are well and be really at heart no very being desperately diseased that's

I judge a far worse thing really more dangerous there's comfort for those who are wounded those who know that they are sinful there's a comfort in the gospel what a comfort the Lord speaks to his people sorrowing people Jeremiah chapter 31 represents them coming back returning like those from the captivity returning by the rivers of water with weeping and with supplications will I lead them but then he speaks of comfort comfort for the sorrowing soul satisfaction for the weary soul wiping away of the tears comfort your hearts a beautiful thought it may be said to be

I was going to say almost wasted for want of a better expression upon those who are self sufficient and strong think that they can manage for themselves but how precious it is to the little children how precious it is to the weak how precious it is to the sick and sore to know there is a good physician who dispenses comfort that ye through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope so Paul says the former things were written to this end establish you in every good word and work well just a word upon this expression establish you direct you uphold your goings we may feel that in this we are very weak indeed we are and we need strengthening and we need great help and we feel to fail how we find at times that we are foolish we don't speak when we should speak we don't honour our

[48 : 01] Lord perhaps times we are even sorrowfully sadly ashamed of him and of his words I've known those times when I felt I ought to have said something I ought to have spoken I ought to have reproved the blasphemer I haven't done it missed the opportunity but there are times when we speak and we shouldn't do and we need wisdom there's a time to speak and a time to be silent we need that establishing don't we direction by the Holy Spirit for there are good words but sometimes our words are not good oh that we might have that grace and that godly spirit and we need establishing in that which we do the direction encouragement strength to do his will give us strength one praise to do thy will to know and to do his will to carry on to carry on even though there may be discouragement to carry on though there may be opposition though there may be criticism though there may be weariness well these things come don't they upon our hearts we need establishing in the days of

Nehemiah when they were building the wall of Jerusalem rebuilding it they had their oppositions they had their discouragements the strength of the bearers of burdens is decreased they came with this objection to Nehemiah who was leading the work and there is much rubbish there's there's a good man who was seriously ill in hospital not an old man youngish man but he was very much impressed with that word and he felt that he needed much done in his heart to make him ready for the Lord there is much rubbish well the strength of the bearers of burdens was decayed they needed strengthening they needed establishment sometimes we need that don't we in the way that we may continue may God then grant to us that help strengthen us with his strength encourage us and direct us in the way for his name sing to him by his he he brought him to a k k