

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 – “Overflow of Joy and Outflow of Love”

Summary Statement:

In this passage, Paul expresses his deep gratitude and joy for the Thessalonian church, highlighting his concern for their faith in the face of adversity. He prays earnestly for their growth and unity, emphasizing the importance of love and holiness in their relationship with God and each other.

Outline:

1. Overflow of Joy – 3:9-10
2. Outflow of Love – 3:11-13

1. Overflow of Joy – 3:9-10

3:9 - *For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God,*

It was as though Paul didn't have the words to adequately share the kind of thanks and gratitude he had for these saints. Seeing these new believers thriving and growing in their faith gave Paul such joy.

- This is the great thing about joy. It's not circumstantial. It doesn't depend on what you're going through. Paul's joy came often by what he saw God doing in others.
- Notice that, Paul isn't taking any credit for these believers who are walking in newness of life in Christ. He's not sitting there thinking, *'You all owe me a debt of gratitude. Do you know what I went through to deliver the gospel to you. If it wasn't for me you'd still be sitting in your sins, guilty before God.'* But Paul doesn't take any credit for himself, he gives thanks to God! God's the one that has done this. He gets the glory!
- And when we're glorying in the Lord, there is much joy to be found.

I like that Paul directs his thanks to God. He doesn't need to get a big head when things go well, nor does he need to feel like a failure when people don't receive. It's God's work. We're just the instruments. And we simply give thanks to Him for what He is doing in all circumstances. Whether that's with me directly, or with another believer, there's reason to give thanks.

I like what John writes in **3 John 4**, *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."* You'd think that John would say Jesus was his greatest

joy, or that he is joying in his salvation. And not to take away from any of these, but John writes that his greatest joy is to hear that his children walk in truth. Seeing those that John ministered to continuing in the faith was something so profound and so strong for him that it caused his joy to be at a high. This is what Paul is expressing in this chapter. There's something so beautiful within the church family in that our lives are so inseparably intertwined through Christ. There's no other group like it. Paul would rejoice when they're doing well. Their joy is his joy!

- That's a great lesson for us, our joy should not be based on what is taking place in our own lives, but what we see happening in those around us. Our drive to church on Sunday should be like we're on the autobahn because we can't wait to get here and increase our joy as we take part in Christian fellowship. We get to hear how God is working in others, how people are growing in faith and living out love and grace to one another. I'm overjoyed to hear the testimonies of those getting baptized today. What a blessing! What a joy it is to see and hear what God is doing. Don't get so narrow sighted on your own life that robs you of joy and misses out on what is happening around you. May your joy increase as you broaden your view further off you.
- It's been said J.O.Y. stands for Jesus, Others, You. That's a good focus to ensure joy.

3:10 - *night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?*

Paul was so eagerly desiring to be with them that he prayed non-stop for the Lord to lead him to them. He prayed **exceedingly**. This means beyond measure. He couldn't pray too much for this need and there was no bad time to take this to the Lord (**night and day**).

- Aren't you thankful that we have an open door to the throne room of heaven? Do you realize how amazing that is? I think if we truly fathomed the significance of that, we'd be taking things to the Lord night and day as well.

And what's interesting is that Paul could have easily communicated to this church by a letter, as he was doing. But there was no substitute for the blessing of face to face interaction and pouring into another soul in person.

Paul's visit with them was cut short and he knew there was much more to share with them to see their faith mature and be perfected.

- Now whenever we see this word **perfect** in Scripture we can easily be filled with a sense of inadequacy. *I'm far from perfect, I'll never get there*, we can easily think.
- But this word perfect is the Greek word *katartizō*, and it means to prepare, restore, complete, or mend. It was used to speak of fishermen mending their nets.
- A fishing net has lots of holes in it, but you mend it to make sure it doesn't have the kind of hole that's going to be problematic. We too have lots of holes in us; we're not perfect, but we want to see things restored and mended in a way where it's not going to be a downfall for us.
- Paul wanted to be with these believers in Thessalonica to continue to see them mended and brought to completion in their faith, so that there were no holes in their theology or faith in Christ.
- What are some areas in your life where you need perfecting so that your faith is not lacking. We're a constant work in progress. Don't ever think you've arrived and have no area in which you can grow.

2. Outflow of Love – 3:11-13

3:11 - *Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.*

Paul is a little more clear here in the nature of his prayer. He's praying for the Lord to direct his way to them. Remember how he said back in 1 Thessalonians 2:18 that they longed to come to them but Satan hindered them. There's been opposition. But Paul doesn't take matters into his own hands and begin to say screw you Satan, I'm not going to let you stop me. He prays and asks the Lord to open the way for him. Paul knows that the Lord must be the One leading him on.

- In praying specifically to get back to Thessalonica, Paul models an important aspect of prayer. We are often more comfortable with praying in general than with praying in specifics. To pray specifically is to bring the details of our lives into God's presence. Paul expresses his honest desire to God. But this does not mean that if he doesn't get to Thessalonica his prayer has not been answered. Rather, Paul is simply committing his desire to God for direction. To pray in specifics is to open ourselves to God's direction and control. Such prayer is based on the premise that we may or may not be on the right track with our desires. It is not a demand for a specific answer, but a search for God's guidance.

This is far removed from a concept which makes prayer into some kind of a shopping list for God's magic provision. ¹

An important note here in this verse, Paul prays both to God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a statement of equality being given here. The double subject of God and Son is followed by a singular verb in the Greek for **direct**. The way this is written is confirming the deity of Christ and the unity of the Godhead. This coming at one of the earliest of New Testament writings.

3:12 - And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,

Now as Paul continues to share his desire for these Thessalonian believers, he shares that he wants their love to increase and abound. But notice something, this love isn't just generated by trying to squeeze it out and force yourself to be loving. Paul says, **may the Lord make you increase.**

- As Christians, our love should be overflowing in us because we're in relationship with God. And God is defined by love: **1 John 4:8**, *"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."*
- **John 13:35**, *"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*
- **1 John 4:20–21**, *"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? ²¹ And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."*

The writer of these verses knew something about this love. John was known as the disciple whom Jesus loved. A self-assigned title albeit. But I believe it's because John truly knew the love of Jesus and that it wasn't dependent on John's level of love. John experienced this great grace and unconditional love that was His in Christ. And he wanted nothing more than to see others experience it. And one way people experience the love of Christ is through you loving them that way.

- John in his old age pastored the church in Ephesus. He would travel around from place to place and they would sit him up in the front of the congregation and he would simply say, My little children, love one another. This is so important.

¹ Demarest, G. W., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1984). *The Preachers Commentary Series* (Vol. 32). Thomas Nelson Inc.

And yet in the book of Revelation the word came to this church that they had left their first love (Revelation 2:4). They didn't lose it. They weren't robbed of it. They walked away from it. They failed to walk in that love for the Lord, and it inevitably carried over in their lack of love to others. We can easily have our love grow cold if we stop reflecting on the source of love – Jesus. Don't become complacent in what you have in Jesus. Meditate often on the love He has shown you, give Him thanks daily for His amazing love and grace, and let that fuel you to love others with the love you've been shown.

- Where would you say your love meter sits today? Is it trickling out a little? Is it sitting at an all-time low? Or is this love abounding and overflowing as you abide in the love of Jesus?

Paul didn't have a lot of time with these people he's writing to, but yet he says their love is abounding to them. This wasn't a love that had to be earned, it wasn't a selective love, Paul and his friends just had a love that was beyond them and flowed from Christ. That's the kind of love we need. One that is rooted in Christ and flowing from Him.

3:13 - *so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*

Again, Paul wants to see these believers established in the things of the Lord. This is the same word used in vs. 2 where they would be fortified; strengthened. And here the establishing is to bring them to being ***blameless in holiness***. The flow of these verses shows how this holiness is all linked to this abounding in love. In other words, there's a real tie to love and holiness.

A heart overflowing with love is the route to holy conduct. It's the way that a person is no longer living for selfish motives and personal pleasure.

- Biblical love is a sacrificial, giving love. It's unconditional.
- The first time the word love appears in the Bible is in Genesis 22. This is the story of Abraham ready to sacrifice his son Isaac. It's an incredible picture of what God did for us in giving us His Son to die in our place and bring about our righteousness.
- **John 3:16**, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*
- This kind of love directs us away from ourselves and our needs and focus' us first on our need to serve God and bless others. That's holy

living right there. To be holy means we are set apart to God, and set apart from the world. We're no longer doing things our way, but God's way. That's why love is so key. Living a life where we're abounding in love to one another gets our focus off self.

Now once again, Paul reminds them of Jesus' return. He's coming again with all His saints. That's those that have died in faith in Jesus, and those who will be raptured up. We'll talk about the rapture in Chapter 4. But this seems to be speaking of the second coming of Christ to the earth. The rapture is when Jesus comes for His church, the second coming is when Jesus comes with His church.

And a focus on the return of the Lord is a great way to live holy to the Lord.

1 John 3:3, *"And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."*

Those that have put their faith in Jesus as their Saviour now stand in His righteousness. We have confessed our sins, declared our need for His forgiveness, and we're now redeemed and reconciled – wrapped in His righteousness. We are blameless before Him. And when we see Him, we will experience once and for all that removal of the presence of sin. We will finally be perfected.

But there's still a need to live blameless in this world. We don't want there to be any accusations of fault or wrongdoing in our lives that are sticking to us. We want through regular repentance and confession to be walking in purity and holiness so that there's nothing that somebody can bring against us.

And as we're increasing and abounding in love to one another, we'll be walking in greater holiness. What a great connection that is.

Points to Ponder:

1. Is your joy small because your world is too small?
 - Paul's joy wasn't rooted in his circumstances, but in the spiritual progress of others.
2. Is your love increasing, decreasing, or stagnant?
 - It's only as you allow the love of Christ to be flowing into you that people will sense the love of Christ flowing out of you.
3. What does your life look like in light of Jesus' return?
 - Would your life look different if you knew Jesus was coming back this afternoon?