

1 Thessalonians 2:17 - 3:13

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[0 : 00] Now, we turn to God's Word, and we're going to look at this passage. I borrowed the theme from the Scripture, I think it was the Scripture Union Bible Study, perhaps, I can't remember.

But spiritual parenthood, we could entitle this message in different ways, but that's perhaps one way we might think about it.

Parenthood is something with which we're all familiar. We are parents, or we are the children of somebody.

We know what parenting is about from different angles. And certainly, this is about spiritual parenthood.

And when we think of that theme, we approach it from two different angles. It's all about, parenthood is about relationship.

[1 : 05] In Japan these days, one of the ways to meet a need, a huge need in society, is parenting, is to teach parenting classes.

That being done with much usefulness and help and benefit in some communities in Japan. Mothers are coming to learn how to parent their children, and they're interested to know the Christian viewpoint. Parenting is so important. And it implies, in the case of spiritual parenthood, a relationship with God.

And it isn't just because God is our Creator that He's our Father. It's because Christ has died and we believe in Jesus Christ, and in believing, been given the Spirit of children, whereby we understand God the Creator as God the Father.

We are His children, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, reconciled to the Father. The Father reconciled to the child. A wonderful picture, which of course is reflected in the relationship, the second aspect of the second approach to parenthood, as we think about it, the relationship between a parent and a child.

[2 : 31] And the whole process of being reconciled constantly between parent and child. And then the object of that, whether it's a spiritual or a physical parenting, the object is to develop mature youngsters, children who grow up with integrity and with character and above all, personal faith in the Lord Jesus.

That's the goal and the aim. And that certainly comes across here in Paul's passionate concern for these young believers, his friends, his younger brothers and sisters there in Bethelonica, which was a prosperous, busy, throbbing, thriving center, government and culture and money and all the rest, pagan and Roman.

And yet God, in His mercy and goodness, embedded that situation with the Gospel. And men and women were wonderfully converted to faith in the Lord Jesus. And Paul was so concerned for their spiritual development and welfare.

And so I'd like to think about two things which have to do with parenthood today, and I believe they are here in the text and lend themselves to a systematic consideration.

The first thing is that spiritual parenthood is about longings. We long for our kids. I have three daughters. And we long for them.

[4 : 08] I knew an elderly man in Drummond Docket where I was minister for a while. And we used to go and visit him. He was in his 90s. And he had, I think he had six children. And he said, Oh, I worry about them every day.

I think about them every day. Some of them are in New Zealand. Some of them are in South Africa. Scattered all over. And he says, They'll always be my children.

There's this longing for the best for them. And we see that in chapter 2, verse 17. But brothers, when we were torn from you, Paul says, for a short time in person, not in fact, that's when they

hear, Pilate and Timothy, I believe, under cover of darkness and flee for their safety's sake. Sal eventually took Corinth. He says, Out of our intense longing, we made every effort to see you. And these longings are a result of being tied together, aren't they? The closer we are, the stronger the bond.

[5 : 23] And that bond was there in spite of the distance that separated them. These longings were intense. I remember not too many months ago seeing a program in connection with remembering the Holocaust.

An elderly lady, an elderly Jewish lady was talking about when she was separated from her mother as they were put into concentration camps.

She was about 16 years old. And she said, They physically pulled us apart and sent my mother in one railway box car, is what we call them in America, and me in another.

And she said, We never saw each other again. They were torn apart. And that describes the intensity of feeling that Paul had for these dear young Christians.

Quite remarkable. Quite remarkable. And these longings were focused. Notice what he says in verses 18 and 19. He says, For we wanted to come to you, certainly I told you, again and again, but Satan stopped us.

[6 : 39] For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ when he comes? Is it not you?

Without your hearts and wrinkles, wealthy, prominent women, traditional religious Jews, truth-speaking, deep-speaking, Romans, is it not you?

Indeed, you are our glory and joy. They were his glory and his joy. That's amazing that Paul should say that.

He saw beyond the present. And most of us look at one another if we don't look at ourselves in the mirror every day and we think, well, a crown, joy, glory.

Does your brother mean that to you? Does your sister mean that to you? The younger Christians in the congregation or those who you know maybe at work or in your neighborhood, a crown and a joy where Paul had, Paul had given himself to them and his longings were full of concern in the last part of verse 5 of chapter 3.

[8 : 01] Paul says, I was afraid like a weary parent. The children who've gone off, some of that have gone off to university for the first time and were anxious that they get into a good church home or get into the CU or something like that.

I was afraid that in some way the temperature might have tainted you and our efforts might have been useless. His youngings were full of concern. He was concerned because these trials were in verse 3 of chapter 3 he says so that no one would be unsettled by these trials.

They were really going through it as young Christians. Often that's not the way when somebody becomes a young Christian. God somehow protects them so they can get their roots down and go forward.

But in this case, that wasn't what was happening presumably. It was a desperate, dangerous, difficult, terrible, dying time. And so, Paul was full of concern.

His yearning, his longings were full of concern. But also, these longings and yearnings, these longings prompted action. We see there in chapter 3, verse 1, he says, when we could stand it no longer, text them, at least text them and find out how they're doing.

[9 : 35] And back comes a text message, we're okay, that sort of thing. Oh, well, what a relief. So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens.

We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ. And then again, in verse 5, he says, for this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith.

His longings prompted action. John Scott has written a very helpful commentary on 1st and 2nd Thessalonians.

And he spends quite a bit of time talking about the extravagant language which Paul uses here to describe his concern for the Thessalonian Christians.

And then he goes on to talk about the church father, Chrysostom, who was about in the 5th century AD. Chrysostom talks about the fiery warmth of Paul's longings.

[10 : 54] And he goes on to talk about Charles Simeon, who was a minister of the gospel in England for almost 50 years, I think it was, in the 19th century.

And he said, his was a loving, powerful, warm, character and spirit that reached out like Paul to his people with a burning passion.

And Chrysostom said, he would give his eyes if some of the members of his congregation would come to faith in Christ.

He said, I would rather have light, he said, I would give up light if my people would become Christians. that was a longing.

And, and one asked, well, how did he get that? And John's thought says there's only one answer. And the Bible says it. John's thought gives the Bible's answer.

[12:00] He says, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Lord, here I am. I don't have this kind of a passion, but I know I should have, and I've got to begin where I am right here and now, Lord.

So, help me, help me. Open up my, the tent of my heart and lengthen the ropes and do what you need to do to give me a bigger heart of love for my brothers and sisters round about.

love. And, you know, it's very interesting that when we decide to be interested in others, take a real interest, a good, healthy, strong interest in others, and we turn away from ourselves, a new love erupts.

A new hope for this in our relationship with God and one another comes about. And that's certainly what Paul had. Paul just abandoned himself to the Thessalonians.

And C.S. Lewis says, love is very costly and we know. He says, you can just hide yourself in the coffin of selfishness. I'm paraphrasing hugely what C.S.

[13:22] Lewis said. And he says, you do, you insulate yourself and nobody will bother you, but you'll die in there. He says, it's costly to love, and we don't have to be told by C.S.

Lewis to know that. Jesus played the supreme fight because he loved us. He abandoned himself at Calvary for you and me.

And nobody longs like Jesus Christ. And Paul would look at the love of Christ and say his love failed. So would Christmas them. and so would Charles Simeon.

And anybody else who's loved passionate like that would have to say, well, my love pales in the face of the love of Jesus. So, that's one of the things, the first thing that I would suggest parenthood is about.

It's about longings. Longings for your fellow Christians. Longings for those around you who don't know Jesus, your neighbors, your workmates. You know, you talk about programs to advance and to spread the gospel and you have the programs, but you are the program.

[14:41] I'm the program. And people watch us all the time. I'm the one that can touch somebody beside me at work. And I mean I, generically.

You, you. I couldn't get next to them, but you can. God's pleased you there, strategically, wonderfully, placed all of you in your different professions, in your different kinds of work, whatever it is, right across the spectrum.

He's placed you there. And if you and I are open, He gives us His longings for the people around us. So enough said.

Parenting. I'm really talking about parenting, but I'm also talking about if we're parenting properly, we won't just care for the young Christians and our brothers and sisters, but we'll be caring for those who don't know Jesus.

So, the second thing which I would suggest spiritual parenting is about is rewards. You know, a mother or a dad goes off to university and sees son or daughter graduate, and they're so proud.

[15:57] They wouldn't say it, maybe, but you're so proud. You see the photograph in the paper they graduated. It doesn't have to be that. Graduating isn't the only thing parents are proud of their children for.

Simple achievements at school or whatever. Even just making the bread and tidying up the room. You're so proud. You're just like that.

There are rewards in keeping on in our relationship as parents with our children. But there are these huge rewards all have in view, not just on the here and now, but then, notice, there is word then, he says there in verse 19 of chapter 2, for what is our hope, our joy, or the crown, in which we will glory, the crown, the queen wears a crown full of jewels, diamonds, and emeralds, and all the rest. A crown is a very special thing. What is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus?

Paul is always looking ahead with an eye to eternity and eternal glory. He's got one foot here and another foot there in glory.

[17 : 28] That's his perspective constantly, it seems. He's thinking about these people in terms of eternal glory, and he says, you are our reward, you are our crown when we stand in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

I don't know how that's going to work out, but what a wonderful picture, Christ Jesus, the risen Holy One, who came as a lamb to shed his blood and give his life, and there he stands, and there is my neighbor, who came to faith, Jesus says, because you lived a faithful life, because you spoke to him or her, because you did what I wanted you to do, they've come to Christ, and there's glory, and there's wonder, and Paul says, that's my reward, that's my reward, and it's because he did something for somebody, isn't it you, indeed you are our glory, and our joy, what a vision, what a vision, that's then, but now, there's the reward now, a mom and a dad may not see the future, I mean, they're hoping for the future, they have a vision for the future, but they're here and now, for example, there in verse 6a, Paul talks about the reward of good news of faith and love, they're getting on, you, you, you text, you text with them, and they're working away, they're making good things, they're getting on, and such good news, in verse 6, the first part of verse 6, he says, Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and your love, love, that's a wonderful reward.

When a young Christian you've been praying for is going on with Jesus, an affectionate remembrance is another reward in the last part of that verse.

He has told us that you always have present members of us and that you learn to see us just as we learn to see you. They remember us with a positive, with affection, encouragement.

[20 : 11] Encouragement there in verse 7, therefore, brothers, in our distress, have you ever thought that when you're really up against it, and you're being persecuted, one way to be encouraged is by the steadfastness of your brothers and sisters in Christ, they're keeping on, keeping on, as it were they're reaching for you, they're with you in faith and love.

That's an encouragement. And it's because Paul invested himself in the lives of these folk in Thessalonica. And that we and I invest our lives, we get outside ourselves and we begin to think about others with love and care, new love and new Christ-like care.

When the chips are down and the game is tough, we hear how they're getting on, and we're encouraged. That's the way it works. It's a gift, it's a reward, and then he talks about fulfillment, and he says, no, we really live, not because you've got a sod car, or a Porsche, or because I've got a paying tree, so I've got a bigger house, or whatever, no, he says, so now we really live, since you are standing firm in the world, that's his fulfillment, we really live.

well, I can't measure up to this, I don't know about you, but this is tremendous. Jesus has opened up this brilliant, loving man's heart to love like that, to have a passion like that, and then his reward, his thankfulness and joy, if he prays for them, he says in verse 9, how can we thank God enough for you, in return for what?

All the joy we have in the presence of God, because of you. Paul is going through himself, down there in Corinth, all alone in that immoral, idolatrous place, he's going through it, and yet he says, when I pray, there's such a sense of joy and praise to think that God by his Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, had saved you, from all the Miss Thessalonians, Thessalonians, all the ethos of a busy Roman capital, God has salvaged you for himself, diamonds, for himself, to make a crown for all joy, and the privilege of helping them, the reward of being able to help them, in verse 10, night and birth, we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith, in other words, the reward of being able to teach them, and to help them, and to act, the reward of being able to do something for them, in the face of worry, and in the face of persecution.

[23 : 24] about three years ago, I was down at the OMF conference, the Overseas Missionary Fellowship conference, in Swarmick, and I went there because I wanted to see a man called Makino, he's Japanese, his wife is Isu, and Makino was there as one of the speakers, I had known him when he was a student, we were missionaries in northern Japan, I didn't have a lot to do with him, he was a very live wire kind of character, at the university, and he was the kind of person who liked to tell everybody else what to do, and he was always right, he was kind of a pain in the neck, he was a very zealous Christian, and so on and so on, the years passed, and when I saw him three or four years ago, he was sixty years old, sixty years old, and that's quite old in Japanese society, and one of his eyes, he had bright, snappy eyes, and sparkly white cheeks, and always smiling,

most unusual, for most

Japanese don't have such a big, excellent, corrugated smile, but he certainly did, and he was known for that, but that smile was there, the eye was gone, cancer or something, he'd been in the war, he'd been, he joined OMF after studying and preparing in whatever way God wanted, he joined OMF, he was in Thailand for ten years, then he came to Singapore to supervise the orientation of new missionaries with his wife, Isu, God never gave him any children, which of course was very sad, and very difficult, but when he met me, he got up from the table, it was just lunch, tea time, and I arrived, he's half my size, he came over and he grabbed me around the middle, and he said, Buell, Sensei, teacher, Buell, and I thought, well, I didn't have a lot to do with Makino, a lot of other missionaries did, but I thought, this man is a crown, he'll be a crown,

I don't know whose crown, not mine necessarily, because as I say, I didn't know him too well, but he's salvaged from a way of living, and a way of thinking, that had left God out, that was dark, and idolatrous, God has salvaged him as a teenager, a live wire, at some point, a pain in the neck, but eventually, a dear brother, always a dear brother, but that's what I'm getting at, you see, the reward, the reward, and the third thing about parenting is prayer, you know, I believe nobody, I probably said it before, but I believe nobody prays for a youngster like a

Christian parent, nobody, nobody cares for a youngster like a Christian parent, and that's something, if you're a young person here today, away from your family, and your family is Christian, you should be so thankful for, your parents' prayers will be there, morning, noon, and night, like an umbrella over you, protecting you from you don't know what, surrounding you day and night, Paul says there in verse 10 of chapter 3, he says, night and day we pray, continually, a continual vision, the Olympic flame never goes out, where the Christian parents' prayer never goes out, is there continually, and it's earnest, most earnestly, that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith, the fervent, effective prayer of a righteous man, a woman, avails much, the Bible tells us, it does much good, and how we need to dwell on that, to think about that,

Jesus got up early in the morning to go pray, I find that very difficult, but I try to pray sometime through the day, prayer, earnest prayer, a prayer, three-thirds really, that they might see them, in verse 10, he prayed earnestly specifically that we might see you, and then he prayed earnestly and specifically that we might be able to help you supply what is lacking in your faith, and then finally in verse 11, that we might come to you, Satan has hindered us, so we're praying that God will open the way, clear the way, for us to come to you, I remember my sister and I were in Glacier Park, Montana, USA, five years ago in the spring, wanted to cross

[28 : 56] Glacier, cross Logan Pass, but we couldn't, because there was a hundred foot snowdrift, and we're plowing it out, that's the picture, the Holy Spirit by our prayers plows through the snowdrifts and opens the way, but he was also praying for an increase and overflow in their love, which is exactly what we should be praying for today, may the Lord make their love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you, to pray that God will increase our love for one another, our concern for one another, and for both around us, even as Christ's love is to be concerned for one another, even as Christ, a man in, in the barn, two men in the barn church who became Christians in the past few years, first thing they did was to go and tell their neighbors they were sorry, and one of the neighbors said, you might turn, that their love might increase, and that, that, and he prayed for strength of heart, that they may be strengthened, you may be, may he strengthen your hearts, so that you may be brainless and holy in the presence of our God and

Father, when our Lord Jesus Christ comes, and that goes back to the business of when you and I are holistically concerned about others and wholeheartedly concerned to do things for others and be concerned for others, as Christians, that's something for our holiness.

Instead of worrying about being holy, we get out there for Jesus Christ's sake and begin to care for other people, and that has a very wholesome, powerful effect upon our lives.

Love is the means by which hearts are established in holiness, said one commentator. And that's what Paul thought. And the more he was out there reaching out, caring, the more the Holy Spirit enlives his heart, not only in love for others, but in holiness of life.

That's remarkable, isn't it? Because when you're out there working for others, invariably, the Holy Spirit gets a hold of your heart and impresses you with the reality that if you're going to do anything for them, you've got to pull up your own socks and get your own cupboard and wardrobe in your heart, cleaned out and cleared up, and full of the light of Jesus.

[31 : 49] Paul's hope, and I'm quoting Paul's hope, was the hope of Christ's second coming. His joy was a joy that wouldn't pale in the awful presence of Christ.

His holiness was a holiness to stand the test of those searching eyes. That, Paul, loved like a parent. And may God help us to be longing, to be looking for rewards, and to be a praying people that we might be faithful in our responsibility as spiritual parents, to the end that God's people will be many women of integrity and character and maturity, and be built up, built into the house of living stones, because we are caring spiritual parents.

God bless you, dear friends. God bless you, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.