

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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WALKING AND PLEASING GOD

Paul loved the young ecclesia at Thessalonica that grew out of his service to the Lord, and he exhorted and encouraged them as a father and a mother. If we want to know how to encourage a local ecclesia, Paul's heart is our example.

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, unceasingly remembering of you the work of the faith, and the labour of the love, and the endurance of the hope, of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of our God and Father.... (1 Thessalonians 1.2-3 YLT)

The faith of the brethren was at work; it was not an idle faith, for they labored in love in all that they did. This labor of love had to be the love that they had for one another, something for which Paul commended them more than once. Combined with their faith and love, they held to the expectation or hope of the coming of the Lord. It was not just hope but an endurance of the hope. Hope leads us to endure so that we might reign with Christ. Their hope led them away from serving idols to serving the living God as they waited for God's Son to come from heaven. Notice that they were serving as they waited. Again, their faith was an active, living faith driven by their expectation for Christ to come.

For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entering in we had unto you; and how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1.9-10 ASV)

God will judge the unrighteous and unbelieving in what is called His wrath, but Christ delivers all who believe from what is to come. A day is coming for the unbelieving to suffer; however, today is the day for God's people to suffer.

For ye, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judaea in Christ Jesus: for ye also suffered the same things of your own countrymen, even as they did of the Jews.... (1 Thessalonians 2.14 ASV)

For verily, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are to suffer affliction; even as it came to pass, and ye know. (1 Thessalonians 3.4 ASV)

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. (2 Thessalonians 1.3-5 NASB)

Notice how Paul commended them for their perseverance and faith in the midst of the persecutions and afflictions that they endured. This was a plain indication that they will be worthy of the kingdom of God and, undoubtedly, will reign with Christ.

If we want to reign with Christ, we must endure under suffering and any persecution that comes our way, for the sake of the evangel of Christ. As Paul exhorted: **For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord** (1 Thessalonians 3.8 ASV). No matter what is going on in our lives, we are to stand fast in the Lord and not waver in our faith, love, or expectation.

Paul became very practical in his exhortation to the brethren.

For the rest, then, brethren, we are asking you and entreating in the Lord Jesus, that, according as you accepted from us how you must be walking and pleasing God (according as you are walking also), that you may be superabounding yet more, for you are aware what charges we give to you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God: your holiness. You are to be abstaining from all prostitution; each of you is to be aware of his own vessel, to be acquiring it in holiness and honor, not in lustful passion even as the nations also who are not acquainted with God. No one is to be circumventing and overreaching his brother in the matter, because the Lord is the Avenger of all these, according as we said to you before also, and certify, for God calls us, not for uncleanness, but in holiness. (1 Thessalonians 4.1-7 CV)

The will of God is sanctification or holiness. We are to be clean and not dirtied by the passion of lust that is common among the unbelievers. We are called to be set apart unto God, a people who are not like those in the world but who are walking worthily of the kingdom.

Paul brought the matter back to love, love of the brethren.

But concerning love of the brethren ye have no need that one write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another; for indeed ye do it toward all the brethren that are in all Macedonia. But we exhort you, brethren, that ye abound more and more; and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your hands, even as we charged you; that ye may walk becomingly toward them that are without, and may have need of nothing. (1 Thessalonians 4.9-12 ASV)

There is no higher walk than the walk of love. God is love, and we are to be an expression of His life. We are to abound in love, even when the world around us might hate us and revile us. Work with your hands so that you can be a vessel of love, able to help others, and not be a burden to your brethren. Love helps when there is a true need.

In conclusion, how are we to be walking and pleasing God? We are to be walking in love. In his Ephesians epistle, Paul encourages us to be imitators of God, the God who forgives, and as His beloved children, we are to walk in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. Walking in love demands that we put off all immorality or any impurity or greed, and walk as children of light, for you are Light in the Lord (see Ephesians 5.1-21). Light and holiness go hand in hand, just as light, life, and love go hand in hand.

But love is the greatest of all and the purpose to which God is moving. Where there is light, there is love. Where there is life, there is love. Where there is holiness and purity, there is love. Why? Because all true light, life, and holiness come from God is love.

May you be encouraged to walk in love, for **love never fails** (1 Corinthians 13.8)! **There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out all fear** (1 John 4.18). Love conquers all!

Love is what most pleases the heart of our God who first loved us (1 John 4.19).