First Thessalonians 5:25-28

5:25 **<u>Paul begs for their prayers for his and the other ministers' lives and labors in the gospel</u>**.

1. Consider the injunctions he used to encourage the Romans to pray for him (Rom 15:30).
2. Without the blessing of God upon preacher and hearer, there will be no fruit at all.
   a. The gift of the ministry is given to men who are but earthen vessels (II Cor 4:7).
   b. Paul purposely chose to reject the educational tools of preaching, so that any faith or obedience resulting would be entirely by God's power (I Cor 2:1-5).
   c. Unless the Lord opens hearts, as with Lydia, they are helpless (Acts 16:14-15).
   d. Unless the Lord gives repentance, there is nothing they can do (II Tim 2:24-26).
3. There are clear objectives for our prayers for ministers revealed in the New Testament.
   a. Pray for verbal utterance to make known the mysteries (Eph 6:19-20; Col 4:3).
   b. Pray for boldness in speech over fear, as they should (Ep 6:19-20; Phil 1:18-20).
   c. Pray for the gospel to have free course and be glorified (II Thes 3:1; Mat 13:19).
   d. Pray for them to be delivered from unreasonable men (II Thess 3:2; Rom 15:31).
   e. Pray for their ability to make things manifestly clear to hearers (Colossians 4:4).
   f. Pray for churches and hearers to receive their service (Rom 15:31; II Cor 1:11).
   g. Pray for their refreshing with joy by the brethren, by God's will (Rom 15:32).

5:26 **<u>Paul exhorts them to personal and intimate public salutations of one another</u>**.

1. As children of God and saints in His church, we realize "blood is thicker than blood," in that the blood ties in Jesus Christ are stronger, deeper, and more precious than family. So warm physical expressions of affection and unity should be pleasant, not painful. And it should not surprise us that Peter refers to it as a kiss of charity (I Peter 5:14).
2. Personal and physical greetings are incompatible with envy, strife, bitterness, division, or enmity, which exalts physical affection as a protective tool against such things; and the apostle was always opposing these sins to magnify the unity and peace of the Spirit.
3. We hug relatives, close friends, and others in moments of great affection or appreciation; but kissing is quite rare in our society other than for romantic purposes.
4. We find all the kissing exhortations among his salutations, not among the rules of brotherly love (Romans 16:16; I Cor 16:20; II Cor 13:12; I Thess 5:26; I Peter 5:14).
5. And they are so positioned in his salutations to likely be little more than the "xox" we put at the end of some personal letters with words like, "Give everyone a hug for me."
6. Kissing was part of salutations in the New Testament (Mark 14:44), but such salutations were not universal, especially such personal and intimate ones (Luke 7:44-46; Gal 2:9).
7. We find little difference here from their practice of washing feet, which was done in their culture for the dry and dusty climate and lack of socks and enclosed shoes. And there is further similarity with the anointing of oil, which was also a kindness due to climate that was shown sometimes but not always (Luke 7:46).
8. Jesus told the disciples to wash one another's feet (John 13:12-17), but we know this merely illustrated humility and service; for the churches did not practice such a rite, or Paul would not have used it as a unique mark of exceptional widows (I Tim 5:10). It is amazing to hear the proponents of feet washing argue adamantly for the one while rejecting the other out of hand, though it has even more Scriptural foundation.
9. Jesus understood there was no need for feet washing with closed shoes (John 13:10).

10. We want to do more than shake hands, for a handshake holds the other at a distance, and shaking hands is not considered a very personal or intimate form of greeting or saluting among good friends. You do not greet close family with handshakes.
11. If we choose the literal and direct sense of this text as a literal and perpetual rule, do men kiss women? (Women kissed Jesus very intimately.) On the hands? On the feet? On the lips? How often? How long? Both morning and evening services? With or without hugging? The reason these questions exist is because it was a social custom, which we have lost and therefore neither understand the method or the limitations.
12. And how could we keep the designation "holy," since kissing would be so very unusual to both participants and observers, due to its lack of use in our culture and society?
13. The right hand of fellowship given to Paul was a public act of authoritative approval (Gal 2:9), not a personal greeting or salutation of personal affection and love, which leads us to separate it from our practice of greeting our new members with affection.
14. If we lived in a country where kissing was accepted as appropriate greeting by intimate friends, we might well apply this passage differently, with the rules of that culture.
15. Even in a culture and time where it was accepted, Paul always limited it to a "holy kiss," which rejected any lascivious kiss (Pr 7:13) or treacherous kiss, like that of Judas.
16. Therefore, we will continue to apply this passage with regular hugging between those of the same sex and infrequent hugging of those of the opposite sex, which is the more intimate form of greeting in our society and culture, and far superior to casual greetings.

5:27 **<u>Paul charges them to make sure the epistle was read to all the members of the church</u>**.

1. Public reading of Scripture to men, women, and children had been done fervently (Deut 31:12; Josh 8:33-35), and its public interpretation was greatly appreciated (Neh 8:1-12).
2. Paul charges them with an oath for public reading, but Rome condemned such with a curse: they could not bear the liberating power of Scripture. It was just 1963 with the Second Vatican Council that they stopped performing their services unintelligibly in Latin in the United States and allowed lay people to read the Scriptures for themselves.
3. Robert Raikes, the liberal owner and editor of the *Gloucester Journal*, invented Sunday Schools in 1780 to keep the unruly children off the streets on Sunday, their only day of freedom from working in the factories.
    a. He combined the teaching of reading with character training and the catechism as a successful method to reduce the crime rate among the poor of the cities.
    b. These Sunday schools became the rage, as most Christian churches have them today in some form or fashion in most nations of the world.
    c. Sunday schools effectively destroy family worship, replace ordained preaching with lay teaching, reduce the sobriety of worship, reduce the public reading of Scripture, introduce entertainment into worship, and dumb down Bible learning.
4. The public reading of Scripture should both be emphasized and appreciated (Rev 1:3).
5. Paul charged the Colossians to swap epistles with the church at Laodicea (Col 4:16).
6. We are most blessed to have all his epistles inspired by the Holy Ghost (II Tim 3:16).
7. Even our children are to be taught the Word of God in childhood (II Timothy 1:5; 3:15), which is done Scripturally and best by devoted parents and a faithful pastor.

5:28 **<u>Paul closes the epistle with his standard signature of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ</u>**.

1. The de-merited favor of Jesus Christ in our lives is our single most necessary blessing.
2. Every epistle Paul wrote concludes with this personal mark of his (II Thess 3:17), even the epistle to the Hebrews, which so many want to deny to Paul (Hebrews 13:25).
3. Grace is His operative kindness toward us from predestination to glorification.

a. Constant remembrance of His grace is certainly a duty of thankful saints.
b. Still facing the combined foes of Satan, the world, and our flesh, we are dependent upon fresh supplies of grace to serve acceptably (Hebrews 12:28).
c. While the eternal, legal, and vital aspects of His grace have been given, we need practical grace on a daily basis to serve Him faithfully (Heb 4:16; James 4:6).
d. If He withdraws His practical grace, we will quickly and severely backslide (Job 36:17; II Samuel 24:1; II Chronicles 32:31; Luke 22:31-32).
e. For this reason He taught us to pray for His preservation (Matthew 6:13).
f. Such practical grace was important to Paul (II Thessalonians 3:5; Eph 3:14-19).