

The Glorified Word

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At times it can be difficult to see the progress of the gospel. News of tragedy and scandal seem to challenge the Bible's idea that Jesus defeated sin, death, and evil through his own death and resurrection and is making all things new. Is the gospel making any difference? Here's how you can know: Pray for the gospel, deliver from evil, and peace at all times.

Pray for the Gospel

Evaluating the progress of the gospel can be like watching a horse race. You pick the horse; it bolts out ahead, but then falls back, then surges ahead. This repeats lap after lap. What should we do? Change horses? Give up on the gospel? The first solution is *to pray*. Paul says, *Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored* (1). What pray for? Speed. The word means "to run." It's used of horses rushing into battle (Rev 9:9), people sprinting *to spread the word* after seeing the risen Christ, which started in Jerusalem, moved out through modern day Turkey and into Greece, where we find Thessalonians. But despite this considerable progress, the Thessalonians struggle to believe. We find Paul praising them for their initial response to the gospel and super abounding love, but also correcting them for fearfulness and doubt. *Where do you find yourself this morning?* Did you have a commendable initial response to the gospel but fade in your zeal? Perhaps you've grown in love for others, but begun to welcome doubt, question, adopt a position of distrust? *Why?* For the Thessalonians, it had to do with outside voices. It's not that they read or heard voices outside the church (important); it's *they gave the voices more weight than the words of Jesus and apostles*. Friends, teachers, city leaders. Now just because it looks like our horse has fallen behind, should we give up? No, if you have the winning horse you stick with it, cheer it on. You keep the faith. Why should we keep faith in the gospel? Second reason he says to pray. *Because it will be honored*. The word honored means *to glorify*. Olympic athletes who were victorious were awarded great glory and honor. He's saying the word of God will be glorified, victorious. In fact, this is *already happening among the Thessalonians*, and will be fully celebrated when *every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* (Phil 2). Keep the faith. *And listen, if you want your faith to really increase pray for the Word speed ahead be glorified.*

Prayer has a way of verifying what you believe. It takes a belief and puts it to the test. It creates existential proof of the gospel. I can tell you my wife is a great person, that you can trust her with your real estate needs, but you don't really know, don't the existential proof, until you speak with her yourself. And many do. They get a referral, hear she's a great realtor, *but don't make a decision until they sit down and talk with her.* But the more they talk with her, the more confident they become they've made the right decision. Their belief increases. So it is with prayer. You can hear about the gospel, study it's claims, but its not until you sit down and talk with the Gospel, with Christ, that you see for yourself how good and trustworthy he really is. And the more you talk with him, the more confident you become, the more excited you get about his words spreading throughout the earth until you see the horse coming around the final lap. The gospel pulling out way ahead. It's going to win. And when you know, do you stop cheering? No, you get more invested, more excited. You yell and scream and celebrate. Friends, the gospel will be victorious. And the more we pray for it, the more we're convinced of it, and the closer we come to Christ. Cheer it on in prayer. You can make this part of your week by designating *Monday is for Missions.* Pray for gospel progress in Austin, Dublin, Montreal, Istanbul on Mondays. Ask God to strengthen his people in those cities and for the gospel to speed ahead and be glorified in those cities. The finish line is coming. *Lift your voices, cheer for the Church, and advance of the gospel.*

Deliver from Evil

Now that said, there is opposition to the gospel race. Paul asks for prayer to **be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith** (2). Sometimes opposition is self-evident, evil. While Paul and his companions were in Thessalonica *evil* men (same word) formed a mob, attacked the house where they were staying, and threw the whole city into an uproar. A friend of mine was a missionary in India and was jumped, a knife pulled out and slashed his face. He has a scar down the length of his chin. But very often opposition to the gospel is subtle. Satan shows his hand as a last resort. Recall chapter two. A figure will emerge who leads a significant portion of the church astray, while looking the part. Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn may come to mind, but Paul has in mind something more insidious. The word **wicked**, never translated this way in NT, means "out of place." There are people within the Christian

community that don't fit. Something is off. In the OT it's people who are *out of place in God's moral order*. Are you spiritually out of order? Have you put work, marriage, friendships, a cause above God himself? I attended a musical where most of the actors were in the right place, but some were out of order. They distorted the flow of the musical, the beauty of the performance, standing, jumping, moving incorrectly. In a similar way, when the church overlooks spiritual disorder it distorts the message of the gospel. It sends the message that an individual can have Jesus as redeemer but something else as Lord. How do you think we end up with stuff like MeToo? What should we be doing? Verse 6: [Keep away from any brother walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.](#) The word for **idleness** means to defy good order. The good order, here, isn't just moral goodness but gospel goodness, being flippant about the tradition of the gospel, which insists Jesus not just as Savior but *King*. This is not someone who has sinned once and practices repentance; it is a person who walks in defiance of the truth. They're a danger to others because they elevate issues, preferences, desires over the gospel. The main idea here is to keep distance from a Christian who is living in defiance of the gospel. You don't smooth it over because you want to "keep the relationship." That's cheap love and disloyalty to Christ. It is cheap love because it puts your social comfort over their eternal comfort. It's disloyal because it puts a friend over Christ. Say hard things, but say them with love, and if you can't say them well, say them anyway. Their soul and the reputation of Christ are at stake. Pull the performers aside and say, you need to work on this. You're out of order with God, others, and its causing problems. Do it, not to shame them, but to bless them, so the whole cast can thrive. Correct for progress and glory of the gospel.

Peace at All Times

What do you do when it seems like the gospel isn't making progress? Pray for the gospel, deliver from evil, and *peace at all times*: [Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.](#) This is an audacious promise, peace at all times, every way. Inner *and* outer peace coming together, shalom. Plantinga: "[Shalom is the webbing together of God, humans and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight.](#)" Now this is the kind of thing everybody wants, but very few people experience—inner *and* outer, deep, abiding hopefulness and comfort in hard times. We often settle for a shallow version

of it that goes something like, “I’m okay with it. I’ve made peace with the way things are.” A kind of emotional bargain, a surrendering to the way things are (it is what it is), but it’s not walking in deep, hopeful, shalom. That deep peace comes, like confidence in the gospel, not by surrendering your emotions to a force but surrendering your control to God. I know a woman who was pregnant with twins, and desperately wanted to be a mother. She went into labor at 20 weeks, and held on for 10 days in hospital. Dr. came in and said, you have an incompatible cervix. Age of viability is 24 weeks. The babies will not survive. Before she gave birth to one stillborn baby, and one who took three breaths and died, she turned to my wife and said, *I know my babies are okay*. What did she mean? I can tell you from walking with her it wasn’t superficial, emotional bargain. It was much deeper. It meant, I trust the Lord; I have peace. How? she knew she could trust her Lord with her babies, in that moment and forever. The Lord is your peace. And he’s pledged his presence. Not, I’m at peace with it, but Peace is with me. *The Lord be with you all*, all times, all places. This kind of faith comes from a habit of trusting promises like this in smaller, less significant ways, so when the big trials come along you have *existential proof*, an abiding sense of God’s trustworthiness. And you look to *him* for peace. You take him at his Word. And the great news is that Jesus is coming back to bring peace on earth, inner and outer peace will web together in comprehensive shalom. All things will be new, the gospel will be glorified.