

2 Thessalonians 3
A Continuation of the Study of the Formation
Of the Church

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By
Leon L. Combs, Ph.D.

2Thes 3:1 “Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you;
2Thes 3:2 and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.
2Thes 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.
2Thes 3:4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.
2Thes 3:5 And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.”

Paul had finished dealing with eschatology and now wanted to end the letter with some other requests and information. His use of the word “rapidly” would bring to mind to the readers that a runner would quickly get the letter to the Christians at Thessalonica and in the region. His prayer for glorification of the word of God, especially in light of his saying just as it did also with you, means that he asks them to pray that people would be convicted and be granted salvation by His word. His request for deliverance from perverse men relates to those people who are capable of harmful deeds toward others and evil men relates to those people who are not only evil themselves but those whose goals are to bring others into their evil behavior. Paul probably has in mind deliverance from the people of Corinth who were giving them such a hard time while he was writing the letter (Acts 18:5, 6, 12, 13). The people who did not have faith are those to whom no faith has been given and, in particular in this instance, would be those who had rejected his message of the Gospel.

Certainly not all people have faith but he reminds them that God is faithful and therefore dependable. From experience Paul knows and reminds them that God will strengthen them and protect them from Satan. In saying that God will strengthen them he is referring to spiritual strength that we all need to fight a spiritual enemy:

Eph 3:16” that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man;”

The word “protect” is related to military actions to help those on the side of the person doing the protecting. John also wrote of the actions of Jesus in protecting His people from the evil one.

1John 5:18b "but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him."

Paul can have confidence in them because of all the great news he had received about their works of faith since he had been gone. Because they have already demonstrated their faithfulness he can trust that they will continue to do as he commands them. As Americans we may not like to hear that someone else is commanding us to do something but Christianity is not a democracy! Christianity is a theocracy. We are servants and disciples of Jesus Christ and we are subject to His commands through His apostles and His Word. Paul, as an apostle, had the authority to command Christians to be obedient. We must also treat his words today as commands that we are to obey.

He then prays that God will remove all obstacles from their path so that they may grow more in their love for God and that they may be as steadfast as Jesus in doing their tasks. Part of our sanctification is the removal of any thought process that might keep us from a total dedication to Jesus. The Holy Spirit will work in us to remove those obstacles but we have to cooperate. Jesus never wavered in His doing the will of the Father and we need to learn from His example.

2Thes 3:6 "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.

2Thes 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you,

2Thes 3:8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you;

2Thes 3:9 not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example."

Note that Paul says that he commands them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to separate themselves from an unruly brother! Even without the command being in the name of Lord Jesus Christ, this is a strong command from an apostle. But to make the command in the name of Lord Jesus Christ makes this command extremely urgent and it must not be disobeyed. It is extremely important for us to not associate with people who say that they are Christians but are not behaving as God's children. As clarified in the rest of the writing Paul is referring to those people who are not carrying their share of the work load in the community. Paul demonstrated by example that all are to work. Even though he, as an apostle, could have said that he had to spend all of his time spreading the Gospel and not take time to work for what he needed, he worked for his material needs. In refusing to associate with those in the church who refuse to work, we are participating in church discipline. The purpose of all church discipline is to bring the recalcitrant people back into faithful obedience to the Lord. Our example in the body of Christ is to work to contribute to society and to fellow Christians.

2Thes 3:10 “For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.

2Thes 3:11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies.

2Thes 3:12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.”

Paul reminds them that his commands are not new for even when he was physically present with them he also told them that if someone refused to work then he was to be refused meals. He had now received word that some of the church members were not working at all and leading an unruly life demonstrating no discipline. Self discipline is absolutely necessary for a Christian to continue in the sanctification process. These people were not working for their food and they were also interfering in the lives of other members of the church. Paul had previously warned them of such bad behavior:

1Thess 4:11 “and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you;

1Thess 4:12 so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.”

1Thess 5:14 “And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.”

He was now “taking off the gloves” and commanding them to work for their own bread. They were leaven in the church and, if left alone, could lead to considerable corruption within the church. Leaven must not be allowed to just spread for that is a way that Satan uses to take away the strength and function of the church. It must be dealt with as soon as it appears.

2Thes 3:13 “But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.

2Thes 3:14 And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame.

2Thes 3:15 And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

Paul now even further tends to cleaning up the church. He reminds them to not grow extremely tired of doing good works. Sometimes it seems like we may be the only ones who are doing God’s will and we could start to have a “pity party”. None other than Elijah had such an occasion:

1Kings 19:9 “Then he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

1Kings 19:10 And he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”

But God showed him that he was not alone:

1Kings 19:18 “Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

Sometimes we may want to stop making the efforts to do what God has called us to do but we must not doubt the sovereign Lord of the universe. He has work for each of us to do and we need to keep on doing the tasks for Him.

In the last two verses Paul is clear about how we are to treat a member of our church who is not obeying the Lord. We are not to treat him as an enemy but we are to treat him as a wayward child whom we want to bring back into the fold. When we refuse to associate with him, it must be clear to the person that we still love him but if he will not obey the Lord then we must not be his friend. If the person is really a Christian he will feel shame at our treatment of him and ask to be let back into fellowship. When the person repents we must then forgive him and reestablish friendship probably on an even deeper level than before the incident.

2Thes 3:16 “Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!

2Thes 3:17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.

2Thes 3:18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”

Paul then gives them a very special benediction and by his writing he is making them know for sure that he is the author of the letter. By asking for the Lord to be with them continually and in every circumstance he is asking God to grant them peace at all times and in everything they do. What a wonderful blessing! We can have peace at all times and in all that we do if the Lord of peace is always with us. Grace is God’s undeserved goodness toward us that gives us courage and strength to do His will. Grace is necessary for salvation and for the continued existence as His children in this world.

Heb 4:16 “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”

We often forget to go to the throne of grace and we do so to our detriment. So please make it a habit to go with confidence to the throne of grace.

References

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