

# Serving and Waiting

by John F. Walvoord

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*Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to pray, love God, and wait patiently for the coming of the Lord, emphasizing the importance of faithfulness and perseverance in their Christian walk.*

**Topics:** "Spiritual Warfare", "Christian Living"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the closing portion of 2 Thessalonians 2, emphasizing the riches of our salvation and the need to stand fast in our Christian life and testimony. He highlights the importance of prayer, especially in the face of opposition and spiritual warfare, stressing the dependence of preachers on the prayers of God's people. Walvoord urges believers to direct their hearts into the love of God and patiently wait for Christ's return, while also emphasizing the practical aspects of Christian living, including working diligently and not growing weary in well-doing.

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## Transcript

2 Thessalonians 3:1-18

In the closing portion of 2 Thessalonians 2, a tremendous revelation of the riches of our wonderful salvation was given--that God chose us in eternity past and saved us through the hearing of the gospel message as it was preached. Because of this, we have glory ahead. On the basis of these truths, Paul exhorted the believers at Thessalonica to stand fast and to continue in their Christian life and testimony.

Exhortation to Pray

The third chapter of the epistle presents some of the privileges and responsibilities which belong to a true believer in this age. This first exhortation is a reminder that all of us need: "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith" (vv. 1-2). The Thessalonians were in trouble and tribulation. Some of them probably were in danger of their lives because of their testimony for Jesus Christ. It was in this affliction and trial that Paul was trying to help them and comfort them by reminding them of the great verities of the faith. At the same time, he speaks of their continued obligation to serve the Lord.

While Paul was writing to them about their troubles and the Lord's comfort and help for them, he had been reticent about his own troubles. Paul, too, was having his difficulties. The task committed to Paul was a

very lonely one: to go from place to place, frequently coming into a strange city where not one person would welcome him. He was not entertained in the best hotel, nor was there any honorarium for him in recognition of his services. He had to find his own way, arrange for his public meetings, and somehow try to bear a testimony for Christ. Apart from fellowship with the Lord, it was a very difficult and solitary task and one in which there were many discouragements.

With this as a background, without complaining or saying very much about it, Paul asks the church at Thessalonica to pray for him. In effect, he was saying, "Don't forget that I need your prayers, too. You are not the only ones who are in trouble. You are not the only people who need prayer." This was sound advice to the Thessalonians. One of the best ways for you to be helped to bear your own burden is for you to get under someone else's burden. If you realize that others have needs too, as you pray for them it will make your own load lighter.

Paul also really needed their prayers. He told them to "pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you." The average layman does not realize how much a preacher of the gospel is dependent upon the prayers of God's people. Whenever an evangelist or a Bible teacher attempts to expound the Word of God, he is not only contending against failure on the part of those who listen, but against the unseen powers of darkness. He is engaging in a spiritual warfare. All the powers of hell are arrayed against him. There is a battle on, spiritually, whenever one tries to do something for his Lord.

No one can win the battle alone. There never has been a preacher used of God who was not supported by God's people in prayer. Even an ordinary person without extraordinary gifts can accomplish a great deal if God's people pray for him. Paul was a great leader, and God had given him wonderful spiritual gifts, had marvelously called him to serve Him, and had used him. But Paul was first to confess, "I cannot do it alone. I need your prayers." So he writes them: "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you." Behind every victory for the Word of God there must be a victory in prayer. When calling on a certain college president years ago, I asked how things were going. His reply was, "We are going forward on our knees." That was the right answer. In the Lord's work, progress made when we are not on our knees does not amount to much. It must be progress in prayer.

In all our labor for the Lord, it is very important that we pray. God has not called everyone to be a great preacher, teacher, or leader. There are some who could not even teach a Sunday school class and do a good job of it. They just do not have the gifts. On the other hand, it is surprising what God can do with a person if he is willing. Some have more gifts than they realize and are just too timid to use them. But there is one thing which every Christian can do, and that is to pray.

Prayer is not a gift. It is the universal privilege of every child of God. God has given us the ability of speech, and He has also given us the privilege to talk to Him on our knees. The marvelous thing about prayer is that every Christian is on the same level. Some believers may know more than others, but in the work of praying each believer comes to God in the name of Christ. What more could anyone desire than that? The small child as well as the mature saint has equal access to the throne of grace. In writing the Thessalonians who were young Christians, perhaps too much occupied with their own needs, Paul urges them to pray.

Prayer for Deliverance

Prayer is effective in overcoming opposition. In verse 2, Paul writes: "That we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith." Sometimes in the Lord's work, we have the experience of opposition in our testimony for Him. It may be a very serious matter. If one were in any of the countries which Russia controls today, one would know what it is to have the opposition of unreasonable men. One would realize something of how Satan can use human beings to hinder the preaching of the gospel. This kind of opposition to the preaching of the gospel is not limited to Russia, however. It can also be true right here in the United States in one form or another. Even here men sometimes risk their lives in taking a bold stand for the gospel. We need divine deliverance as we preach the Word, not only from satanic power but also from instruments which are under the control of Satan. Our weapon is prayer.

How often we have to come back to the statement in Ephesians 6, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, "the forces of Satan behind the scenes. That is the real battle, and that is why in Ephesians 6:18 we are exhorted to be "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." The victory is possible only through prayer.

This prayer is, first of all, for the Word of God and its power, and then prayer for deliverance from ungodly men.

A word of assurance follows in verse 3: "But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil." Christians are often unfaithful. Often we are disappointed in their promises and commitments. But we can depend on the Lord. God is faithful. One of the things that we learn through the various experiences of life is that, though we may be unfaithful, God is never unfaithful. We can always depend on God to do what He has promised to do. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that God will hear and answer prayer. God is faithful not only to answer prayer but He will "stablish you, and keep you from evil." It is another way of saying Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to them that love God." Paul is here reminding the Thessalonians that even in their trials and tribulations God will work it out for their good and to His glory.

Paul anticipates their faithfulness in prayer in verse 4: "We have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you." Can others depend on us to do the right things? When the call to duty or worship comes to us, are we in our place? As he writes the Thessalonian believers, Paul has confidence that they will be faithful.

### The Love of God

Having laid upon them this exhortation for prayer in verse 5, he directs them to a different channel: "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." That is just a little phrase, but how much it says. We are in a world that has so many bids for our affection. The issue comes up as to what is first, God or our loved ones. It is not always easy to make a decision. Then there is the enticement of money. We are told in the Scripture not to love money. One does not have to be rich to love money. One could be very poor and still love money. The temptation to love things and power to do what money can do is a temptation. Another lure is the love of the world, the love of the pleasures of the world, the comforts of the world, and the appearance of the world. It is dangerous for a Christian to have his heart set on something other than the Lord.

Recognizing this constant temptation facing us in this life, Paul tells the Thessalonians, in the midst of their trials and troubles, and service for the Lord, they are not to forget to love the Lord. This is one of the most important things in life. The Lord is more interested in our hearts than He is in what we do, or what we

give, or what we say. He wants most of all our love. If He has our love, everything else will fall in line. This is why Paul exhorts them, "Direct your hearts into the love of God."

### Patient Waiting for Christ

Then Paul adds the last part of verse 5 which goes along with loving the Lord: "...and into the patient waiting for Christ." Once again he sets before them the goal of the Christian expectation. He does not say, "Now patiently wait for the Day of the Lord." Neither does he say, "Now patiently wait until the time of trouble comes." That is not the point. He says, "Patiently wait for the Lord." That is our expectation, and that is our hope.

On the basis of these exhortations, he then gives them a list of things that should be done by the Christian who is waiting for the Lord. Frequently in this epistle it has been indicated that a true attitude of expectation regarding the coming of the Lord carries with it a practical daily life. In other words, God did not intend for us, after we have learned the precious truth that Christ is coming back, to sit with starry eyes and folded hands and look up to the heavens. That is not what He wants us to do. He wants us to face the challenge of each day recognizing that it might be the last day before Christ comes. We should make every day really count for the Lord. Christ should be first in the day. We should do the things that He wants us to do. This is a practical point of view.

Accordingly, Paul exhorts the saints at Thessalonica: "We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you" (vv. 6-7). This is an illustration of the fact that as a Christian our life should have order. There were those in the early church, just as there are in modern times, who had a tendency to go off into some sort of abnormal experience, and they were not orderly in their lives. They are told to withdraw themselves from such brethren. He said that which should characterize a Christian life is order and reverence. There should be a respectful attitude toward things of God. This was Paul's own standard: "For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you" (v. 7).

### The Command to Work

Paul brings up another aspect of practical Christianity: "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread" (vv. 8-12). It seems that there were some in this Thessalonian church who had this attitude. They said: "Now the Lord is coming, and there is no use getting a job, or trying to earn our bread. I will eat at your house as long as you have food, and if you run out we will go to someone else. There is no use working because the Lord is coming." Once in a while we find people who are just about as impractical as that in relation to the coming of the Lord.

Paul says: "That is not what I taught you. While I was among you, I earned my own living and worked in order to provide the necessities of my life. I would not be dependent on you. I paid my own way. I provided my own food. Now I have set you an example. You should be providing for your own things. You should

not be living at the expense of others."

Here is a proper Christian standard. But some have adopted the philosophy that the world owes them a living. This is not found in the Bible. The attitude of the Bible is just the opposite. The attitude of the Bible is that the world owes the Christian nothing, but that we owe the world something. We have something to give to the world. This does not mean that Christians should be opposed to any true social program which helps others. But we are not to take the attitude that the world owes us a living. Paul lays down the principle in verse 10: "If any would not work, neither should he eat." That was a simple method of getting folks to work. If they did not eat, they had to do something.

The very fact that they were idle had led them into all sorts of difficulty. Idleness is fertile ground in which the devil can sow seeds. Paul tells them that he hears "that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies" (v. 11). Usually the type of person who does not mind his own business is trying to take care of someone else's business. That was true in the Thessalonian church. Paul's exhortation was: "Get busy. Earn an honest living. Pay your own way. Take care of yourself." You will not have time, then, to be interfering with other people's business and making a nuisance of yourself in the church of God.

In verse 12 he says to them: "Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread." In other words, do not make a big noise about it, either. Just quietly do the right thing, provide your own livelihood and eat your own bread. Do not expect someone else to feed you.

#### Command to Continue in Well-Doing

Paul also has a word of exhortation for those who have been doing the right thing: "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing" (v. 13). Sometimes we can be weary in well-doing in the sense that we are physically tired. There is nothing immoral about that. But he means we should not be weary in well-doing in the sense that we want to quit well-doing. The temptation when we see others who are not doing the right thing is to say, "What is the use? I am trying to do the right thing and no one else is. I think I will quit." Did you ever have an attitude like that? There apparently were some in the Thessalonian church who were having a little trouble along that line, so Paul said, "Be not weary in well doing." Keep on being faithful in the task God has given you.

Further, Paul gives advice concerning fellowship with those who are disobedient: "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (v. 14). This may be a difficult verse for us to apply today. Some Christians have overworked it to the point where they think there is no one good enough for them. That is a sad attitude, too. But, on the other hand, the verse teaches us that we should not pick as our associates and friends those who despise and disobey the Word of God.

It is surprising how much depends on our friendships. Young people as well as those who are older should choose friends among Christian people who love the Lord. Such a choice will save a lot of temptation and keep many heartaches away. It is a good idea for young people to limit their social engagements to those who are Christians, to those who love the Lord. It may cut down the circle of friendships, but the friendships that remain will mean something and will be worthwhile. It may save one from the heartache of a marriage that is not in the will of the Lord.

In writing these Thessalonians about a different matter, Paul states this principle. Do not have fellowship with those who will not listen to the Word of God. Paul is claiming for his epistle that it is the Word of God and to be heeded as a command of God. Have your fellowship with those who are in obedience to the Word of God and who are living according to its standards.

Then Paul adds a word of caution to them in verse 15: "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Do not walk around with a halo that is a little misplaced, saying, "I am holy; you are not holy." You will never help your brother that way. But when there is a real moral issue and your brother refuses to obey the teaching of the Word of God, then there must come a separation. You cannot follow him and follow the Word of God at the same time. These exhortations are practical, but they are all linked with the command to be patiently waiting for the Lord's return. If we are patiently waiting for His return, we will be doing these things which are pleasing in the sight of God.

### Paul's Prayer for Them

In verses 16-18, the other side of the picture is presented. Paul had started this chapter by commanding the Thessalonian believers to pray for him, and now he prays for them. There is a comradeship and a fellowship in prayer. In these three verses, there are three things for which he prays. In verse 16, he prays for their peace: "Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means." Paul then voices the second petition, "The Lord be with you all." Then, he certifies that the letter is genuine: "The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write" (v. 17). It makes all the difference in the world whether the letter is genuine, whether it is the Word of God. So he reminds them that it is a genuine letter, written by an apostle, by the inspiration of God.

The third petition in verse 18 is both a prayer and benediction. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." Consider these three prayer requests: the Lord's peace, that passeth understanding; the Lord's presence, never failing; and finally the Lord's grace, His attitude of love and favor toward us. Certainly of all men we are the most blessed. In spite of all our experiences of trial and trouble, when the Lord is on our side we have more than anyone else. It is far better to be a Christian in trial and difficulty than not to be a Christian and have all the luxuries and comforts that the world can offer.

This epistle closes with the prayer that the grace of the Lord may be with you all. As we come to the conclusion of this study, may the prayer of the Apostle Paul, given so long ago to these Thessalonian Christians, be ours. May the Lord's peace be our portion. May the consciousness of His presence be a daily, moment-by-moment experience. May "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

### Questions

1. For what does Paul exhort the Thessalonians to pray and how does this indicate the nature of our spiritual warfare?
2. How does Paul relate the love of God and waiting for the coming of the Lord?
3. Itemize the things that Paul says Christians should be doing while waiting for the coming of the Lord.
4. What importance does Paul place upon Christians working?
5. How does Paul recognize the danger of being weary in well-doing?

6. With whom does Paul say we should not associate?
7. What are the three petitions with which Paul closes this epistle?
8. How would you summarize the practical exhortations of 2 Thessalonians?

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