

Studies in 2 Thessalonians-04 2 Thes 3:1-18

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer, faithfulness, and self-sufficiency in the life of a Christian, as well as the need for church discipline in dealing with disorderly brothers.

Duration: 34:14

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2, 2 Thessalonians 3:4, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 2 Thessalonians 3:10

Topics: "Studies"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. The sermon is divided into four sections. The first section, in verses one and two, discusses Paul's request for prayer. The second section, in verses three through five, highlights Paul's confidence in the saints. The third section, in verses six through fifteen, provides instructions for dealing with disorderly brothers. The speaker emphasizes the importance of work and the need to redeem the time for the sake of Jesus Christ. The sermon concludes with a prayer for grace and a reminder to be diligent in prayer for one another.

Transcript

We turn, please, to 2 Thessalonians. This morning we come to the last chapter, chapter 3 of 2 Thessalonians. We'll begin reading in the first verse.

2 Thessalonians, chapter 3, verse 1. 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, but the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you and keep you from evil. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you. The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience waiting for Christ.

Now, 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 which he receives of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us, for we behave not ourselves disorderly among you, neither did we eat any man's bread for naught, but wrought with labor 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 example 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.

But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing, and if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means.

The Lord be with you all. The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle, so I write the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

This chapter is really divided into four sections, four distinct paragraphs, you might say. The first is in verses 1 and 2, where Paul requests prayer for himself. Verses 1 and 2, Paul's request for prayer.

Then you'll notice in verses 3 through 5, he expresses his confidence in the saints. You might call that Paul's confidence concerning the saints. Then in verses 6 through 15, he gives instructions for dealing with what he calls the disorderly brother.

Instructions for dealing with the insubordinate, with the disorderly brother that just refuses to keep in step. And then finally, in verses 16 through 18, you have Paul's conclusion and his final salutation. So we'll go back to verses 1 and 2, Paul's request for prayer.

Notice first of all that Paul did not consider himself to be above the need for prayer, and neither should we. Sometimes we think of a man like Paul, we say, well he doesn't need prayer. You know, I need prayer, but Paul doesn't need it.

But sometimes the ones that you think that of are the ones who need it most. I often think of Billy Graham, and what a tremendous victory it would be for the devil if he could get Billy Graham to slip up. And yet I wonder how many of us in the meeting here today pray faithfully for Billy Graham.

I think most Christians would say, well he doesn't have the problems that we have. No, he probably has worse ones. Being in the position, the closer you stand to your captain, the more likely you are to receive the enemy's shots.

And the more you are in the public eye, the more you are a sitting duck for the devil's attacks. And this speaks to me, the way Paul here asks for the prayers of God's people. I think that all of us, when we get to heaven, that probably one of our greatest regrets will be that we didn't pray more.

Especially when you realize that every prayer is answered. One man said, I measure my influence by the number of people I pray for, and the number who pray for me. But I think that's very good.

The number of people I pray for, and the number who pray for me. I'm always humbled when I meet people. I get letters from people, which I did last week from people, and they said, we pray for you every day.

And I have to write back and say, look, if anything is ever accomplished, it will be through that. Because the work of God is done more in prayer than in any other way. And yet, it's the thing that we do least well, isn't it? Praying.

Most of us would rather be busy doing something else than praying. So, here learn that the Apostle Paul certainly felt the need of the prayers of the saints. Why? Well, because he realized that there were all kinds of oppositions with the spread of the word of God, and that there were evil and unreasonable men

who are out to wreck the work of God.

That's what he says. Pray what? That the word of the Lord may run and be glorified. That's quite an interesting expression.

He wanted the word of God to have pre-course. He didn't ask them to pray about his arthritis or rheumatism, but about the word of God. He was interested in spiritual things, and he wanted the word of God to have freedom to move out.

But, he realized that while there were many open doors for him, there were many adversaries too. So, he prayed that he might be delivered from unreasonable and evil men. When you stop to think of it all, opposition to the gospel is unreasonable.

The gospel is God's good news for men. The word of God is God's instruction to men which, if obeyed, leads to happiness and fulfillment. All opposition to the Lord and to the word of God is unreasonable, and that's what Paul calls these men here.

Yet, he's conscious of the fact that all men have not faith. We don't have to emphasize that today. All you have to do is read the Tribune, listen to the radio, or watch TV, and you'll know very well that all men don't have faith.

The disciples asked the Lord one time, are there few that need faith? The answer is yes, very few. Very few. Probably a very small percentage of the world's population.

But, you know, there's a beautiful contrast there at the end of verse two and the beginning of verse three. It says, "...all men have not faith, but the Lord is faithful." Isn't that wonderful that we have this tremendous power of strength in the midst of a world of unfaithful men? We have a God who is faithful. God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will also, with the temptation, provide a way of escape that you may be able to bear it.

Christ is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And so Paul expresses his confidence, and notice that the foundation of his confidence in the saints is really in the Lord. The Lord is faithful, and Paul was confident that he would establish the saints in Thessalonica and guard them from evil.

Now, that expression, evil, could also be translated the evil one. Maybe it is in your Bible, guards you from the evil one, in which case it means Satan, and we all need to be guarded from the evil one. And God will do it, but we have to cooperate.

We can't compromise with sin. We can't dally around with temptation. If we're going to be delivered from the evil one, we have to be cognizant of his devices and not fool around with sin.

And then Paul says, we have confidence in the Lord touching you that you both do and will do the things which we command you. Here, of course, he's speaking as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that the things he commanded them were the inspired word of God. And then he prays for their sanctification.

He spoke of their confirmation who shall establish you, their protection guard you from the evil one, their continuation that they would do the things he commanded, and now for their sanctification, the Lord direct

your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. The Lord direct your heart into the love of God. That could mean into your love for God or into God's love for you.

Which do you think it means? Well, it could mean either, but I think it means the Lord direct your heart into contemplation of his love for you. You say, why do you say that? Because the next expression says the patience of Christ, really. The King James, it says the patient waiting for Christ.

I think that you'll find that in most versions, it is a patient of Christ. That could mean the patience of the Lord Jesus as a man here on earth. Think of the patience of Christ as a man here on earth who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself.

Who when he was reviled, reviled not again. As we read in Isaiah 53 this morning, he opened not his mouth. That is the lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearer he sung, yet he opened not himself his mouth.

You know, the patience of the Lord Jesus as a man here on earth is something incomprehensible. But you can think of his patience today at the right hand of God. I often think of the patience of Christ, his long suffering, not willing that any should perish.

When you think of the wickedness in the world, when you think of San Francisco and what a test house of corruption and rottenness it is, don't you marvel at the patience of Christ? Those earthquakes yesterday could have just wiped San Francisco right into the Pacific. God is patient. He longs for men and women to come to himself.

Then in verses 6 through 15, you have Paul's instruction for dealing with what he calls a disorderly brother. Now, disorderly brother here doesn't mean someone whose bedroom is in a mess. In the context, disorderly means a brother who refuses to work, and in this case he probably had a very spiritual alibi.

Paul had emphasized the coming of the Lord Jesus in the first epistle, and then again in the second epistle, and some of the people were so on the tiptoes of expectancy waiting for the Lord to come that they said that they just quit work. Now, underneath that, there might have been a slight allergy to work. Maybe they didn't want to water the grass for fear they'd get water on the knee or something like that, but underneath there may have been that allergy to work.

But anyway, he was disorderly in the sense he refused to keep step with the Christian community and with the teachings of the Lord. So, Paul is going to give instructions for that, and you know it's a good thing that this is in the Bible, because there are still people like this in the Christian community. They want to sponge off others.

They're really leeches in the church, and that's exactly the kind of problem that Paul is dealing with here. I should just pause to say that a lot of people think that work was part of the curse as a result of the entrance of sin, and of course that's a complete misconception. Work is not a curse.

Work is a blessing. It was the wearisomeness, the toil, the perspiration that goes with work that was part of the curse. But work itself is not a curse.

It's a great blessing for mankind. Even in heaven we're going to work. It says, "...his servants shall serve him." And those who early in life disciplined themselves in the area of work, of hard work, save themselves a lot of woe in days to come.

So, Paul says here in verse 6, "...we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourself from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." Now, this is a form of church discipline. Here's a man in the midst, and he probably has a wife, and actually he has, let's say, three children, and he's not working. And you think, well, why doesn't he work? He has to feed his wife and three children.

It doesn't seem to bother him, and the pantry is there at home. They just don't have enough to eat, and yet he's super spiritual. He's not going to work.

The Lord is coming. Now, the instruction here is that the Christians are to withdraw themselves from him. This is a form of discipline.

It's less than excommunication. It doesn't say that they should put him out of the church, but it means that in social intercourse, they are to show him that they are completely against his present attitude. You know, when I come to a passage like this in the Word of God, I oftentimes think that, as far as obedience to these passages today, they might just as well not be in the Bible.

Did you know there are pages in the Bible that, as far as the evangelical church today is concerned, they might just as well not be there, because generally speaking, people don't pay a bit of attention to them. And if an assembly-like community tried to enforce some discipline like this, there are a lot of people that would go contrary to it and say, well, I just feel that I have to support the underdog. You'll find them in every group of Christians.

But God's way is best, and God's way is for this man to realize, through the attitude of the other Christians, that he's walking out of step with the Lord, and he'd better get back in step quickly. Again, when Paul uses the word tradition in verse 6, we mentioned before that you mustn't think of that word tradition as, for instance, the tradition of many denominations today, policies that have risen down through the years. When Paul uses the word tradition, he means the inspired teachings of the apostles as they're found in the New Testament today.

Those are the traditions we are to follow. This man walks disorderly not after the tradition which he receives of the apostles. Now, the apostle presents himself as an example of how this man should behave.

Yourselves know how ye ought to follow us, for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you. Well, it's really quite a picture when you think of the great apostle Paul and how he would go tirelessly tramping over the mountains of Turkey and preaching the gospel, and then supporting himself and those who were with him. Paul usually traveled with a team, and his trade, of course, was that of a tent maker.

And after long, weary hours of traveling and preaching, he would sit down and make tents far into the night. And with the sale of the tents, he would be able to support those who were with him. And that's what he's referring to here.

We behaved not ourselves disorderly among you, neither did we eat any man's bread for naught. Well, what does that mean, any man's bread for naught? Well, it simply means we didn't sponge off other people. That's exactly what it means.

It means we earned our own food. Bread here speaks of the necessities of life, and Paul says that he acted independently in the sense that he worked for the supply of his own needs. And he goes on to

explain that, but wrought with labor and travail, night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you.

It really is interesting to think, even when you go back to the Lord Jesus himself coming into this world, God manifests in the flesh, and yet he had a trade. Isn't that marvelous that the one who created the universe and sustains it today by the word of his power came to Nazareth and served as a carpenter? It's really touching to go to Nazareth and see these carpenter shops today there along the road. In fact, we had a young Christian brother that worked in one of them.

It always used to speak loudly to me that the Lord himself would come and sanctify work by himself working as a carpenter there. And here you have Paul following his example, wrought with labor and travail, night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you. And incidentally, this is a very far cry from much that goes on in Christendom today, where the attitude is, how much can I get? Paul's attitude was, how much can I give? How sacrificially can I live in order that people might not die for lack of the gospel of redeeming grace? And then he says, not because we have not power.

That means, it isn't that we didn't have the rights to be supported by the Christians, because he did. The Lord had ordained that. The Lord said that they who reach the gospel should live off the gospel, didn't he? He said, thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.

So Paul says, I really could have come there to Thessalonica and I could have just abstained from all physical work, whatever, and been supported by you. We have the authority. We have the right to do it, but we wanted to make ourselves an example unto you that you should imitate us.

Incidentally, this is why Paul was a spiritual leader. That's what makes a man a leader. You can't teach what you don't know.

You can't lead where you don't go. And the Christians saw the faith being lived out in the life of the Apostle Paul. In fact, the first way they ever knew of the Lord was seeing Christ in Paul.

It's important today. I've had this experience in life where I go to the word of God, I see things in the world, and yet it's when I see those things in a human life that those verses become alive in me. Have you had that experience? You might go to the word and you say, well, I see what it says, and on the face of it, it means this, but I don't see anybody living that today.

And then all of a sudden you come across someone who's living it and say, well, that's right, isn't it? That's just what it says. That's, of course, the will of God, that the word should become flesh in us, that we should be living embodiments of the truth of the word of God. Exactly what Paul is saying here.

Not because we have not the right, but to make ourselves an example unto you to imitate us. No, that's a very searching thing. Can I say to people, can I say to the people with whom I come in contact, imitate me? Well, it's kind of humbling to even think of it.

Well, every Christian should be able to say that. Follow Christ even as I follow Christ. Well, Paul could say it.

Then he says this in verse 10, for even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. And, of course, this was the disciplinary action that the assembly was to take as far as this man's concerned. Now, I confess to you that this raises real questions, and I'm not sure

I have the answer.

I can see why the man should be deprived of food, but what about the wife and three children? This is a difficult one. And certainly the church would want to feel some responsibility toward them, even if it is his responsibility to support them. But this is the word of God, and this is just as much the word of God as John 3.16, verse 10 of 2 Thessalonians 3. How did Paul know about the problem there? Well, he had heard.

Somebody had reported to him, We hear that there are some that walk among you disorderly. Now, here you have the definition of disorderly. Oftentimes the Bible is its own best commentary.

What does disorderly mean? It means working not at all but our busy bodies, and that's a play on words in the original language of the New Testament. It's what you might call a pun or a play on words that isn't exactly translatable in English. It means not minding their own business but minding other people's business.

You know, that's often the problem in idle life. When people don't have work of their own to do, they start, you know, getting into other people's business, becoming, as it says here, busy bodies. One of the blessings of work is that it keeps you concentrating on your own work, not on someone else's.

And so he gives the instruction again, Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ that with quietness they work and eat their own bread. And once again, that expression, eat their own bread, means earn their own livelihood. Not be expecting the church to support them when their able-bodied and can support themselves.

And then he turns to the rest. Now, it shows that only, it was a very, perhaps a minor problem in the church, but there it was, and the mass of the church, of course, wasn't acting in this way. Let me just say this, that God in his wisdom allowed all the major problems to arise in the early days of the church so they could be dealt with in the New Testament today.

That's wonderful, isn't it? Even all the false cults that we have in the world today, they all existed in embryo form in the early days of the church. There's no new false cult. Most of the cults, for instance, today are dealt with in John's first epistle.

Amazing, isn't it? What a wonderful book the Bible is. God in his wisdom, I say, allowed problems to arise in the early days of the church. They were dealt with by the apostles.

The instructions are given to us here in the word. So, he says to the saints, but ye brethren, be not weary in well-doing. Now, generally when we think of well-doing, we think of giving money to the poor, sending clothes to the missionaries.

Those are all matters of well-doing, but that's not exactly what he's speaking of here. You brethren, be not weary in well-doing. Well-doing in this verse means working hard and applying yourself to your work day by day.

And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him that he may be ashamed. Here he's repeating the same social ostracism. It doesn't mean that he can't come to the assembly, doesn't mean that he can't break bread, but means that the Christians, by their attitude toward him, show their disapproval of the way in which he is acting.

He says, yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. You still recognize him as a brother in the Lord, but he's a brother who's out of step, not an enemy. He's on Christ's side, and therefore not an enemy.

And then, of course, you come to the conclusion in which Paul states, first of all, his benediction. He wishes for them the peace and presence of the Lord. The peace and presence of the Lord.

Now, the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. A lovely name of the Lord, the Lord of peace. That means the Lord who is the source of all peace, the Lord who is the giver of all peace.

Give you peace always by all means. That's a wonderful benediction that we might well invoke on those we love, because what this world needs is peace. It's wonderful that Christians can know the peace of God in their heart as they trust in him.

And then he wishes for them not only the peace of the Lord, but the presence of the Lord. He says, the Lord be with you all. You say, isn't the Lord with us all the time? Yes, he is, but there are degrees of his known fellowship with us, aren't there? Sometimes the Lord is as close as our breath seems, and other times he may seem distant when something comes between us.

And so, I think Paul is here referring to the enjoyed presence of the Lord in our lives. Some of you have read the story of Brother Lawrence, that monk who worked in the kitchen of the monastery. He worked in what they called the scullery, and he practiced the presence of the Lord.

He lived moment by moment as in the presence of the Lord, even with hot splattering around him, and dishes, and silverware. And I think that's embodied here in this verse. Then Paul closes this lovely epistle, the salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle, so I write.

Now, there is a difference of opinion as to what Paul means by this. Some people believe that at this point, Paul took the pen in his own hand and closed the epistle. Generally, Paul dictated his letters.

He had a secretary of sorts, and he dictated his letters. The only exception that I know to that is the letters of the Galatians, which he wrote with his own hand. Generally, he dictated it, and then he would take the pen in his hand, perhaps, and close.

And some people think that that's what is meant by the token in every epistle. I kind of think verse 18 is the token in every epistle. It's closing salutation, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

If you'll check the epistles of Paul, you'll find they all close on that grace note. In fact, Paul begins his letters with grace. Grace be to you in peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and he closes them with grace, a reminder that the Christian life is the grace of God from beginning to end.

And I rather think that the token in every epistle is grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. And what a lovely note. I sometimes think that that word grace was the greatest word that ever came into Paul's vocabulary.

Well, it surely is the greatest word that ever comes into ours, too, isn't it? Because none of us would be here apart from the grace of God. So, we'll just close our little study with those words, too. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Shall we pray? Father, we thank you today for this reminder of the necessity of prayer in all of our lives. We know that apart from your preserving power, we would not stand a moment. So, we pray that we might be more faithful and diligent in prayer for one another, and especially for those whom we think stand least in the need of prayer, realizing that oftentimes, they're the ones who need it most.

Thank you for Paul's confidence in the saints, and we thank you that this confidence is well-founded in the faithfulness of God himself. You think of these instructions, Lord, concerning the blessing of work, the importance of work. And Father, we pray that you'll write this lesson in all of our hearts, too.

We realize the time is short. We realize if anybody's going to be busy for the Lord, he's got to hurry. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day.

The night cometh when no man can work. So, Lord, as we see the sands of time sinking, we pray that we might redeem the time and live our lives with a hope for Jesus Christ. Good Father, we thank you for your grace to us in every aspect of life.

Grace, indeed, to us is a charming word, one of the most charming words that ever reached our ears. We thank you in the Savior's name.

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