

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A1131 – July 31, 2011 – 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5
Paul's Prayer Requests & Assuring Words

Today we move to 2 Thessalonians 3 so as we transition let's review 2 Thess 1 and 2. 2 Thessalonians can be divided according to the chapter divisions. Though these were not original divisions they do help us all get on the same page rather quickly, that's the positive side of chapter and verse divisions. The negative side is they often make divisions in the wrong places and break up the train of thought. But in the case of 2 Thessalonians the chapter divisions are very good and so our outline has followed them. Chapter 1 we titled Encouragement, chapter 2 Error and chapter 3 Exhortation. These are the three E's for remembering 2 Thessalonians.

Chapter 1 is Encouragement. They were facing increased persecution and so they needed encouragement. Verse 3, "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows even greater; 4therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you, churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure." So despite the persecutions their faith was growing and their love for one another was growing and Paul was speaking proudly of them to other churches of God. This would be encouraging. And then verse 6 more encouragement, encouragement to continue to persevere under the persecution because God is just and God is going to judge the persecutors. He says, "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels flaming fire, 8dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, 10when he comes to be glorified in his Saints on that day, and to

be marveled at among all who have believed – for our testimony to you was believed." And then in verse 11 Paul prays for them. And so the first E stands for encouragement and it's an Encouragement Of Their Faith, Love And Perseverance Under Persecution.

The second E stands for Error. Since 1 Thessalonians, error had crept into the Thessalonian congregation to the effect that the day of the Lord had already come and they were in it. Paul corrected this in chapter 2. So let's read, verse 1, "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, 2that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy or departure comes first". So the departure has to come before the day of the Lord can come. And the departure is the Rapture. What we know as the Rapture Paul knew as the Departure. And this is Paul's main concern - that the error that had crept in regarding the day of the Lord would be corrected. They were not in the day of the Lord. Verse 5, "Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?" So Paul had taught them these things when he was first with them but now deceivers have come in and challenged Paul's teaching, sound teaching will always be attacked and Paul is deeply concerned about correcting it because it will lead to stunted spiritual growth. They couldn't grow because the false teaching caused mental instability and this is what Paul is interested in settling so they can start growing spiritually again. So the second E stands for Error of the Claim that the Day of the Lord had Come is Corrected.

The third E stands for Exhortation and Exhortation is different from encouragement because Exhortation has an imperative associated with it. It has a command behind it. So in Chapter 3 Paul begins to exhort, specifically for three things, namely prayer and discipline and labor. Paul exhorts them to pray in verse one, "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 2and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith. And he exhorts them in verse six to lead a disciplined life. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you receive from us. 7For you yourselves know how you ought to follow

our example, because we did not act in a disciplined manner among you," and then he begins to give an example of living in a disciplined life. And probably because of the context what was going on there was a certain subset of the believers at Thessalonica, that because of the teaching that Christ was coming soon, they just quit working altogether, so we'll just mooch off of everybody else, there's no use doing any work because when Christ comes back we're going to go into the kingdom and He's going to redistribute everything anyway so why bother working? That's an implication of the false doctrine and so it shows that it does matter what you believe. Here are some believers who say, well if that's true then there's no reason to work, Jesus is coming in the kingdom and He'll redistribute everything so why work? Paul exhorts them to Prayer, Discipline and Labor. These are things which are a proper response to the any moment return of Christ. Since Christ could return at any moment then first we should pray. There are many people out there that have not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ who would miss the Rapture if it were to come today. And there are many evil men trying to block and hinder the gospel. So we should pray.

V 1, exhortation to pray. **Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 2and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.** In verse 1 the adverb **Finally** signals that Paul is done with the heart of his concern in this letter which is to Encourage them in their persecutions and correct the Error that they were in the day of the Lord. Their persecutions had given an opportunity to false prophets, teachers and letters to deceive them away from their patient expectation of Christ's return. Christ returns first for the church and we are to be living in light of that any-moment return. We are not to be looking for Antichrist and his program. But you can see that if a group of Christians like the Thessalonians were being persecuted to the point of death, then you might be more open to the suggestion that you were in the day of the Lord. Paul says you are not, the rapture must come first, then the day of the Lord will come. It is therefore clear that a Christian must have a proper understanding of the basic sequence of eschatological events in God's plan. If he confuses the order and puts Antichrist before Christ, as mid-trib, pre-wrath and post-trib rapture positions do, then it will destroy the practical Christian life of that believer because it will make him unstable, it will mentally disturb him. And so Paul's concern is that they are restored to strong mental health, knowing the truth

and standing firm on the truth and holding on to it tightly with the goal that they are able to do good works and every good word.

So having prayed for the Son and the Father to bring about this inner comfort and strength in vv 16-17, Paul now asks them to pray for him. As verse 1 says, **Finally, brethren, pray for us.** Having prayed for you I request that you pray for us; a request, or command, for reciprocal prayer. Reciprocal prayer is so vital. I pray for you and you pray for me, etc... We all need prayer. No one is without the need of prayer. Why? Because we are all incapable in and of ourselves. Left to ourselves and our own operating assets, namely the flesh, we are incapable of pleasing God. So just as Paul knew that they were incapable of bringing about the inner comfort and strength they needed to grow spiritually and please God so he, Silas and Timothy were incapable of fulfilling their gospel mission and pleasing God. So he says, **Finally, brethren, pray for us.**

And notice, he gives a very specific prayer request. It doesn't stop with **pray for us**, it continues and says, pray THIS for us and he spells it out. And this is a model for us. Paul is once more leading the way by example. He told them what he prayed for them, he was very specific. Now he says pray for us, and here's what I want you to pray for. And by application, when you ask others to pray for you, it would help if you were specific about what you want prayer for. Why? Because first it will show that you have thought through your situation. It's very helpful to stop in any situation and think, hey, what is going on here? It's not always obvious what is going on. You have to discipline yourself to stop in the situation and say, now wait a minute, what is going on here and that will help you formulate a prayer request. It doesn't mean you will be able to exhaust everything that God is doing, but it will show that you are attentive to what the Lord is doing in your life. And second, once you've formulated a prayer request it will give the person you're asking to pray for you some specifics to pray for, some content to think through so that they can organize an effective prayer strategy for your need.

Otherwise, let's say you don't follow those two things and you just say to somebody, hey, could you pray for us, we're going through some things right now. Great, you've recognized you need prayer, that's good, but you haven't given the person very much to pray for. What is the person going to say in the prayer, oh Lord, so and so is going through something right now, I don't know

what it is but you do know and we ask that you will help them get through it. That's all you can do. And the reason that's all you can do is because there's hardly any content to the prayer request. But that's not Paul's example. Paul's prayer request is loaded with carefully thought through content. We are on a mission to take the gospel to the remotest parts of the earth. And there are obstacles to our mission and so his prayer request is specifically pointed at overcoming these obstacles. One of Satan's strategies is to block evangelism. Paul asks them to pray that these blocks be knocked down. I want the gospel to run and be victorious; the NASB has **spread rapidly and be glorified**, but the original words were used in the stadium for running a race and being victorious (Gal 2:2; 1 Cor 9:24ff). And so the prayer request is that the gospel may run and win people to Christ; that's the point, "that the gospel will run and be victorious." If that's the prayer request then what's the implication? That the gospel is being blocked and hindered, that there are obstacles to the gospel being victorious. Now if that's the case then what questions does that stimulate?

If you need to pray for the gospel to run and be victorious then what's the next question? If you don't know the next question then you don't know how to formulate a strategic prayer session. Who or what is blocking and hindering the gospel? Satan is. One of Satan's strategies revealed in the NT is to block evangelism. Well, how does Satan block evangelism? Hmm. Now you're starting to strategize so you can formulate a prayer. See how Paul's content rich prayer request stimulates strategic prayer? How does Satan block evangelism? Well, one way we know is 2 Cor 4:4, "Satan blinds the minds of the unbelieving." So I've got all these unbelievers out there and Satan is working overtime to blind their minds. Why? The obvious reason why Satan blinds minds is because he doesn't want people to believe and be saved. Because every time someone believes and is saved that's a defection from his camp. So now I realize that Satan is waging a war against the gospel and that one of his ways of waging the war is to blind people's minds. This is giving you more content to structure your prayer. Then after you've isolated who is blinding them to the gospel then what's the next question? How does Satan blind people's minds? Answer, Matt 13:19, he destroys the categories of thinking so that people don't understand the gospel. The gospel assumes certain categories of thinking. The gospel assumes that you have a clear picture of who God is, who man is, what sin is, what judgment is. These are all categories that have a definite shape to them and if these get all bent out

of shape in a person's thinking then you can preach the gospel all day long and you're not communicating. I quote from J Gresham Machen. Machen was a brilliant defender of the faith back in the 1920's, a very thoughtful man. He almost single handedly fought off the liberal advances at Princeton. He writes, and this was to pastors, so he's reaching out to the next generation of pastors and he's warning them, "We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas, which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion."

What he's talking about is when paganism becomes rampant in a society, when pagan thought pervades the educational system and penetrates the minds of men on the operational level, then you can talk about the gospel all day long but the pagan just envelops every word you say inside his most basic ideas, chews it up and spits it out as quote 'harmless delusion.' That's a pretty succinct description of how the gospel is perceived today. The world's minds have been blinded by Satan. I'm sure people in your family, you've talked to them about the gospel, you tried to witness to somebody, some friend, neighbor, family member, and you give your testimony: I became a Christian and here's what happened to me, and you think you've communicated just as clearly as you can, and five minutes later they're talking about your psychological makeup and how I can see how that might work for you. But I'm not built like you are psychologically and that's not going to work for me. What happened? What happened was that you witnessed, and you put forward the gospel and they took it and surrounded it with their categories, re-interpreted it and spit it back at you. It never got through what you even meant. That's how Satan blocks evangelism. So now with that understanding of what's going on how do you construct your prayer? If you want the gospel to run and be victorious, you're going to have to start thinking through these kinds of questions so you can structure a prayer that's going to get heard at the throne of grace.

Alright, now Paul gives a second prayer request, verse 2, **and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men;** Explanation for why there are wicked and evil men? **for not all have faith.** That's an interesting explanation for why there are wicked and evil men. The implication is that if

all men did have faith then there wouldn't be wicked and evil men. And I think we would have to agree if we realized how dominating Christian culture would be if all men believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. It would effectively hinder men from being wicked and evil. But as Paul's great understatement suggests there are evil and wicked men because not all do have faith.

Now obviously in this situation Paul's life is in danger. He's requesting prayer that they'll be rescued from dangerous men. So here we have another strategy at work. Strategy one is to block evangelism by blinding the minds of the unbelieving, Strategy two is to persecute believers. And again it's Satan at work. So if Satan is frustrated he'll get physical. It's one way he operates to get you to shut your big mouth. He'll inspire evil men to plot to kill you. And this goes on in many places in the world every day. Wherever the gospel is making serious inroads Satan is killing believers. Don't kid yourself, there's enough Christians being persecuted violently that *Voice of the Martyrs* can publish a monthly newsletter recounting stories, most of which occur in Islamic countries like North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Somalia. So the kind of thing the Thessalonians were facing is not a thing limited to the 1st century, it's a thing that goes on in the world today, it's going on right now, our brothers and sisters in Christ are being executed on a daily basis because they won't shut their big mouth about Jesus Christ. And the tension was rising for Paul, Silas and Timothy. There were dangerous people plotting to take their lives and I want to take you to Acts 18 so you can see the actual situation. The historical background to this prayer request is that Paul, Silas and Timothy were at Corinth. What was happening in Corinth? Paul was depressed at Corinth, not clinical depression, it's just that he kept running into obstacle after obstacle in Europe and he needed some encouragement. At Corinth one of the obstacles was the Jews. Paul had a head on collision with the Jews at Corinth. Paul was witnessing to his fellow Jews that Jesus is the Christ and they were rejecting that Jesus is the Christ; they were in rebellion against Jesus Christ. And so it got pretty dangerous there for awhile. Paul converted the leader of the synagogue and set up shop right next door. So the situation is Paul stole the leader of the Jewish synagogue and moved in next door. The Jewish synagogue is building A on Main Street and next door in building B is Paul. And what do you think Paul is doing day after day after day? Every Jew that walks down the street to building A, the synagogue, Paul is intercepting and preaching that Jesus is

the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and some of them are responding in faith, but most of them did not have faith. So do you see a collision coming? That's what Paul is requesting prayer about over in 2 Thess 3:2, the situation in Corinth, **Pray that the Lord will deliver me from wicked and evil men**; there were some nasty characters that didn't like Paul too much and wanted to get rid of him. In that situation observe in verse 9 the answer to the Thessalonians' prayer. This is the answer to the prayer. "And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." And so the prayer is answered and in verse 11 things settle down in Corinth and Paul is able to spend 18 months, unhindered, teaching the word of God. So this prayer request got a tremendous response.

And that's what we want to see out of the first two verses. Paul gave a content rich prayer request, it gave the Thessalonians food for thought, they thought it through, and they evidently structured their prayers accordingly and petitioned over and over and over at the throne of grace and the Lord heard their prayers.

Now let's move on to vv 3, 4 and 5. **But the Lord is faithful**, that is, in contrast to the wicked and evil men who do not have faith, **the Lord is faithful**, He can be relied upon. To do what? To do two things: to **strengthen and protect you from the evil one**. To **strengthen** you is internal strength, it's the answer to Paul's prayer in 2:17. Paul prayed there for inner comfort and strengthening, and Paul says the Lord is faithful to answer my prayer, **He will strengthen** you, that is, give you inner stability, mental stability so you can advance spiritually. And secondly **the Lord is faithful** and will **protect you from the evil one**. Probably the **evil one** is the correct translation, though it could be the evil men through whom Satan operates but it's more likely that he's talking about Satan himself who was attacking the Thessalonians through the political powers at Thessalonica. They were being violently assaulted and when the assault is so powerful it can be tempting to think that Satan is so strong that he can totally destroy you. But this is not the case. The evil one cannot even touch your regenerate self (1 John 5:18). You're regenerate self is completely safe and secure from the evil one. He cannot even so much as touch who you really are in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so Paul is assuring them that though the assault against

them by the powers that be is strong, the Lord is stronger and He will strengthen them through the assaults and protect them forever.

Verse 4, **We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.** It is very tempting when you are being persecuted to stop doing what the word of God commands. But that they were not is evidenced in chapter 1 where Paul encourages them in their love, faith and perseverance. They were continuing to trust the Lord and love one another and persevere through the difficulties and they were growing stronger in the word. The temptation is that when you enter a trial at first you respond by faith, trusting the Lord to get you through, but as the trial prolongs you begin think, man, this strategy of trusting the Lord isn't working, so you begin to doubt, your faith falters and you shift strategies, we have to try something else. It's a common response that when one strategy doesn't seem to be working to change to another one. The thing is, and I know this pertains to a number of people and families right now at this church, sometimes the trials are prolonged, sometimes they go on for years and it may not seem like operating by faith is working, but we can't see all that God is accomplishing through your faith and obedience. He is winning tactical victory after tactical victory through our faith, and so the response is not to change strategies and stop operating by faith but to continue to operate by faith and follow the word of God. It's called endurance and I know most people in our culture can't endure five minutes. They just want instant relief, but the reality is that God does give us prolonged trials and we're called to faithfully endure, always the strategy is to stick in there and endure, to keep trusting, to keep obeying, it may be a long battle, it may be with you the rest of your life, I don't know, only the Lord knows. But the proper way is to keep on enduring, keep on waging the battle by trusting and obeying.

And Paul says you are trusting and obeying and we have confidence in the Lord that you will keep on trusting and obeying. I don't have confidence in you all by yourself, that you will keep on obeying, but I do have confidence in the Lord. Always put your trust in the Lord with people, don't put your trust in the people themselves, you can't trust people, people will fail you, the only one you can trust is the Lord, so the only place to put your confidence is in Him and that's where Paul puts it. He says, I turn the people over to you Lord, I have confidence in you. And sometimes we have to be reminded of

that, we have to turn people over to the Lord, entrust them to Him. We can't make them live the Christian life, we can be concerned for them, we can direct them, we can teach them, but finally the only one who can make them live the Christian life is the Lord, and we have to keep putting them in His hands, over and over and over.

Verse 5, and here we come to another prayer, Paul was always praying and notice it's specific; when he prays for you he tells you what he prays for you. He doesn't just say, I'm praying for you, he says, here's the prayer, you can read it yourself. **Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.** It's a two-fold prayer where we have God and Christ involved, so again we have a Trinitarian thing going on in Paul's prayer. And this time he emphasizes something about God, His love, and something about Christ, His steadfastness or endurance. And you'll see Paul do this; Paul recognizes that within the Triune God there are distinct roles and he's drawing on that truth here. God is the Father and Christ is the Son. And both of them love, but if you ask which member of the Trinity is the primary example of love toward men you would look at the Father. He gave us His Son. So he says I'm asking the Lord to direct your hearts **into the love of God.** And it's a plenary accusative, both objective and subjective. He's directing you to look at the love of God and thereby bring about the effect that you love God more. That's a good prayer, as we reflect on the love of God it naturally elicits us to love God more. And secondly, **may the Lord direct your hearts into the steadfastness or endurance of Christ** with the effect here that you endure for Christ more. See how that works? As we reflect more and more upon God's love for us what does that do for us? It makes us love God more. And as we reflect more and more on Christ's endurance for us, His life, His death, His sufferings, we realize, hey, I can endure this trial, I can hang in there. Not because I'm so great but because He has gone through everything I have gone through and more and He's my help, He will help me, He knows what it is to go through trials and sufferings and He endured to the end, so can I.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2011