

## 2 Thessalonians 3:1-18

### “Pray For The Work Of God’s Word”

Growing in the knowledge of God’s word is a great goal to have. But as we grow in the knowledge of the Lord; the reality of His return, the world conditions that *surround* it, what life on planet earth will be like prior *to* it... *It’s not only our learning that should be impacted, but our living as well. Learning & living go together. Knowing something doesn’t really benefit us unless it moves us to do something.*

This is why we read exhortations over & over again in scripture to the effect of, “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*”<sup>1</sup> Jesus spoke of the wise man who heard His sayings & *did* them as opposed to the fool who only heard & *did not* do. It does us no good to *learn* it, if we’re not going to *live* it.

In Ch 2 Paul brought some clarity to the Thessalonians regarding the Lord’s return *prophetically*. Here in Ch 3 he emphasizes the fact that, meanwhile, we’re to be about the work of honoring God w/our lives *practically*.

### Vs 1-2

Back at the end of Ch 1 Paul said, “We’re praying *for* you.” Here he says, “But we also desire to elicit (or extract) prayer *from* you.” -- As you read through Paul’s letters to the various churches, it’s fascinating to observe how regularly he would ask other believers to pray for him (& for his team). (No, need to write them down, but Romans 15:30, 2 Cor 1:11, Eph 6:18-19, Phil 1:19, Col 4:3, 1 Thess 5:25, and Philemon 1:22, all contain petitions from Paul, that others would pray for him.) He understood that the success of his ministry (in some measure) depended upon the prayers of God’s people.

& It’s so encouraging because what this tells us is that effective prayer isn’t limited to the super spiritual seasoned saints! This congregation (in Thessalonica) was filled with relatively *new believers!* Yet, Paul would readily solicit prayer from them just as eagerly as he would from the other apostles, or the church in Jerusalem or any other child of God... God’s no respecter of persons. *Your prayers (trusting you’re not entertaining some unrepentant sin in your life) have the same platform before God’s throne of grace as do... whomever you esteem as the “model Christian” or whichever man/woman of God you admire or look up to as having an exemplary walk w/Christ. Paul understood that! So; he says, (& I echo) “Pray for me, & those who surround this ministry.”*

---

<sup>1</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Jas 1:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& His request was 2-fold. #1 “That the word of the Lord may run swiftly & be glorified.” His 1<sup>st</sup> great concern was for the word of God; that it would be free to do its work among others, even as it had among the Thessalonians... Let’s remind ourselves that when Paul entered the city of Thessalonica that he was only able to be w/them some 3-4 weeks! Yet Acts 17 records for us that in that time, a “great multitude” of people were saved! So, we’re left to wonder; what constitutes a “great multitude”? Is it 100 people? 1,000 people? 5,000 people? I don’t know. Suffice it to say, “a whole bunch”. ☺

Paul’s point here being, “You *know* how effective the word of God was among *you*. Pray that it would be received the same way by others to.” (The idea behind “run swiftly” being, “run freely, spread rapidly”. That there would be a pandemic globally of the Word of God). Nothing inhibiting it, nothing seeking to block or barricade its progress. -- Let’s remember that the word of God is alive (Heb 4:12). So pray that it would be free to “run its course”.

2 Thoughts w/that. #1 How does this apply to you? I would ask you this; “What kind of affect is the Word of God having in your life?” Is it free to “run its course”? To challenge & change you, to transform & renew you, making you more like Jesus? Or are there things hindering its progress? It’s not “free to run swiftly” it has to navigate obstacles, work around other priorities? Pray that God’s word would have God’s way (freely) in your life.

So, #1 Is God’s word running swiftly/freely *in* you? #2 Is it spreading rapidly (virally) *through* you? It’s incredible how the silliest video can go viral & be viewed millions of times in the course of a few days... Why is that? Because if we’ve seen something, or have learned something that piques our interest, we’re excited *about* it, or blown away *by* it, our tendency is to *share it* w/others. Listen; this is how the word of God spreads... through you & me *sharing w/others our interest in it, how we’ve been blown away, challenged, changed & transformed by it.*

& This is how we want to build the ministry, right? Not through the programs of man (though plans can be wise) but we want to publish (proclaim), glorify & magnify the word of God. -- As the Psalmist said, “*I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.*”<sup>2</sup>

But Paul’s request makes us stop & wonder doesn’t it?

<sup>2</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [Ps 138:2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We wonder; if Paul asks for prayer, that God's word might work freely & spread rapidly... how often *is* the work of God's word *hindered* by our prayerlessness? Think about that for a minute...

There you are: you go to some church & the preaching just seems dead. The work of God's word just seems lifeless... & There are a # of reasons that might be, right? Maybe the pastor isn't right w/God, perhaps there are deep problems in the leadership, it could be unbelief, or a stranglehold of traditionalism upon the church or (as I said) any # of reasons... But surely one thing we should at least be willing to *look at*, or *carefully consider* is the fact that maybe the real lack in that church is that of *prayerfulness* among the people...

I'm just saying, if you want your preacher, your pastor to move in the *power* of the Holy Spirit, to teach under the *anointing* of the Holy Spirit, to see God *challenging hearts* & *changing lives* than be responsible to pray for him (& for those *around him*, those who serve alongside him)!

I might add that when you come to church, you should come prayed up *personally* & w/a spirit of *expectancy*. If you've prepared your heart & are here to both hear *from God* & to be changed *by God*. I have every confidence that God will meet w/you, minister *to you* & work change *in you*. But if you're just coming routinely... (though it's a wonderful routine to have), if you're not taking the time to prepare your heart, you're not really expecting to hear *from God*, you haven't really purposed to worship or open your heart *to God*... Then don't be surprised if you leave virtually unaffected. – It's the 1<sup>st</sup> Vs of the 16<sup>th</sup> proverb that I quote from time to time... **"The preparations of the heart belong to man,"<sup>3</sup>—**

Perhaps you remember when Jesus taught a certain parable (Matt 13, Mark 4) & He said, "A sower went out to sow..." & He spoke of the seed (which He later explained was the word of God) being sown indiscriminately, all around. But only about 25% of yielded lasting fruit... There was nothing wrong w/the seed (we like to blame the sower, he's doing his job), the problem was found in the soil... The type of ground the seed was landing on. It was either open, ready & receptive; full of other things, or too tough to penetrate.

Circles us back around doesn't it? Is God's word able to run its course unhindered in our lives? What kind of soil does the seed of God's word find in your heart?

#1 Pray that the word of God may run swiftly & be glorified.

---

<sup>3</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). **(Pr 16:1)** Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

#2 “& That we may be delivered from unreasonable & wicked men; for not all have faith.” Anywhere God’s Word is at work there will be opposition as well. It’s not really rational/reasonable, but there are those who want to hinder the work of the gospel... Paul’s prayer is that any hindrance would be removed. Either through deliverance or the salvation of his opponents (let’s not forget that Paul himself was at one time one of those unreasonable/wicked men he’s referencing here).

Some respond positively to the gospel (Vs 1), others respond negatively (Vs 2). Some respond positively, then Satan will *use* them negatively... (he influenced Peter [Matt 16:21-23], he worked through Ananias & Sapphira [Acts 5:1-11]). We’re just asking God that hindrances would be removed & that His word would run freely throughout our lives *personally*, in this *body* on out into the *community* & so on.

### Vs 3-5

Following the flow; Vs 2, “...for not all have faith”. Vs 3, “But the Lord is faithful.” & This is the basis of Paul’s confidence in God’s ability to both strengthen (or establish) & guard (protect) us from the evil one. We can never rest confident in our own ability. But we can always be confident in God’s faithfulness to provide strength in times to trial or temptation & His protection from Satan & his emissaries.

I want you to take heart in the fact that Satan can’t just do whatever/whenever he wants to; to you. 1 Cor 10:13, “*God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*”<sup>4</sup> Even when we think of the extreme circumstances that Job was put through, Satan needed God’s permission each step of the way. God loves you; He has your growth, & His glory at heart... Hold on to the promise of God’s faithfulness.

Not only was Paul confident in God’s *faithfulness*, he was also confident in their *willingness* to comply w/his commands. (Btw, this shows us that God’s work of establishing, & guarding us is done, in part, through His appeal to our will in obeying His word. [Taking us back again, to the wisdom of being doers of His word.]).

God doesn’t just pour spiritual maturity and stability into us. He works it in us through our cooperation with His will. From time & again we jest about the magic pixie dust that we want sprinkled over us as we sleep in the night. We pray for stability; we pray for maturity & it’s like “wah-lah” there it is!

<sup>4</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [1 Co 10:13]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But it doesn't work like that, does it? God appeals to our will in cooperation w/& obedience to His word...

Something else I would briefly point out is this word "command" in Vs 4. It's a military term speaking of an order passed down from a superior officer. The bible is clear that when we give our lives to Christ, we're "enlisting". There's a battle going on & the souls of men weigh in the balance. & In a battle, it is not enough for only the officers to fight; each individual needs to engage! The same holds true in the church.

One commentator (Wiersbe) writes this. "What if an army were run with the same lack of obedience, order, and discipline that we often see in the local church? It would never win the war. If soldiers attended drill whenever they felt like it, they would never be equipped to face the enemy. If the recruits disobeyed their officers' orders the way some church members disobey the Word of God, they would be court-martialed."

Think about that... What kind of trouble would a soldier be in if he/she obeyed their commanding officer's word like so many believers obey God's word? -- & We wonder why the church seems so ineffective... We're to believe the truth, guard the truth, practice the truth, and share the truth... God's word running free, both *in us & through us*.

## Vs 6

Here's that word, "command" again. & Paul ties it to the "traditions" or "teachings" of the apostles. Again, it's not local church tradition that's in view. "We've always done it this way." (We start at "this" time, we do "this many" songs, we partake of communion at "this" time etc). He's in reference to the apostolic teachings that by & large (at this point in church history) hadn't been written down, but had been passed on from one to the other.

But here, Paul adds quite a bit more grit to it. He doesn't simply command them as an apostle (though he could have). But he adds, "In the name of our Lord J.C." That is, "On behalf of all that Jesus Christ is, you need to do what I'm instructing you to do..." It's not a kindly suggestion, it's a command.

& What is the command? That they "w/draw" (that is "avoid completely"), every brother who walks "disorderly". That is, "deviating from the prescribed order of rule". In his previous letter to them (Ch 5:14) he had exhorted them to "warn the unruly". That's the 1<sup>st</sup> step. Evidently the warning had been essentially ignored. So here he ratchets down on the discipline, "Separate yourselves from them altogether."

Now again, we don't separate ourselves from someone because they refuse to conform to *man's* traditions. The focus is on what the apostles *taught* & how they lived.

I should also add that we're not talking about an occasional lapse, someone who stumbles or struggles but has a heart to honor God's word. This denotes a persistent, deliberate course of action.

Nor is this in reference to someone who doesn't consider themselves a Christian. Paul addresses that more fully in 1 Cor 5:9-11. Here he simply acknowledges them as a "brother". In other words, this person claims to be a Christian, yet they don't live their lives according to Christian values or w/scriptural conviction. There needs to be some confrontation there.

Now; what's the purpose in separating from that person (or w/drawing from them altogether)? It's not really for the purpose of punishment (the sentencing of a criminal). It's more to deny the disobedient the aid/comfort of the fellowship until they repent... The ultimate aim is never *condemnation*, it's restoration, reconciliation.

It was a little bit different in Paul's day in that they couldn't just go down the block to the other church. There was only 1 church in town! & The aim was that they would *miss the fellowship* so much, realize the aimlessness/emptiness of their own pursuits & repent!

What this tells us (as a church) indirectly is that Paul sought to build the church in such a way that it was so filled w/love & comfort, encouragement & edification that when one couldn't be there they would genuinely feel sad, be sorry & want to turn from their sin so they could come back! We (the church) should fit that description!

#### Vs 7-9

You see, it seems that some had adopted the mentality that since Jesus was coming soon, they may as well quit working & wait on the Lord! The problem was that they were always showing up at their buddies house at dinner time because they didn't have any money! – Paul says, "We didn't teach you that & we certainly didn't *model* that."

Of course, Paul says, "It's not that we didn't have authority to eat what you provided, or be supported *by* you. But we wanted to be an example *to* you." – What we discover w/Paul is that whenever he would plant a church, he would never receive financial support from that church. Once it was established, they would often support him & he was grateful for that. But never in these infancy stages lest his motives fall into question.

This was Paul's pattern when he was planting a church. Later on, when the church was established, he would receive support from them. But never in the infancy stages. His concern was for the integrity of the gospel.

#### Vs 10

Doesn't need a whole lot of explanation... does it? I *would* say, we realize it doesn't say, "If a man 'can't' work." If you're trying to find a job, or have some kind of disability that prevents you from working, then we *should* help as we can. – But; if you have no desire to contribute in some positive way to society whatsoever, but are content to simply sponge off the work that others do... Then don't show up at dinner time. -- We live in an entitlement type culture right now, if you have it, you need to give it, share it with me. Especially if you have a lot of it! Listen, if you worked for it, get as much as you can! & It's great to bless others, I believe the Lord blesses us to be a conduit through which He can bless others. But blessing others & enabling a victim mentality or an entitlement philosophy are 2 different things.

We concede that God could provide for us any way He wanted to. He could have monkeys build our homes & ravens deliver our food. But He's chosen (by & large) to provide for our needs through our work.

#### Vs 11-12

You've heard the phrase, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop" or "Idle time is the devil's playground" (something like that). That's basically the same principle that Paul points to here... They aren't busy about anything productive, but they've become *busybodies*. They meddle in the business of others.

So Paul "commands" them again through J.C. Rather than spend time gabbing about others, work in quietness & eat your own bread. Instead of being *destructive* w/your time, do something *constructive*... work. Provide for yourself. – As it's been said, "The person who rows the boat usually doesn't have time to rock it."

#### Vs 13

Few things will disillusion & disenchant you like seeing others take advantage of your Christianity, your generosity. But Paul says, "Don't let the manipulations of others discourage *you* from doing what's right." (Again, not *talking* about what's right, not *learning* what's right, not suggesting to others what *they should do*. But *doing* what's right, yourself)

#### Vs 14-15

This is what we referenced earlier on. The motive isn't to punish the person as a criminal, but to win their repentance because you love them. (Ps 141:5) Think of it like this. I have no right to point out the dirt on another man's feet, if I'm not prepared to wash them.

If I'm not willing to love on them, help restore them, then what right do I have to point out the dirt I see in him?

### Vs 16-18

Remember that forged letter they received (Ch 2)? Paul says, "Hey, I sign off on every letter w/my own hand, now you can verify its authenticity."

2 Final thoughts. #1 "Don't grow weary in doing good." Be it through investing your time, your talents or your treasures. Honor the Lord, you're investing eternally, don't give up, don't give in.

#2 W/draw from the disorderly. You've heard the phrase, 1 bad apple spoils the bunch. Birds of a feather flock together. We become like the crowd we run with. As a believer be careful about the company you keep. Find those people who challenge & lift you up rather than tempt & bring you down...

The book ends of this epistle are grace & peace. You're going through tough times. May the peace of God... & the grace of our Lord J.C. be w/you all. – Let's pray.

### Prayer Points:

Lord God, we've been blessed by the incredible insights offered to us through these 2 small letters to the Thessalonians. Now may our learning translate into living & may Your word run freely, spread rapidly, have its way completely in our lives, in this church & through us spilling out into the lives of others.

You should know that God loves you. That Christ died for you & that He stands willing/waiting to forgive you of all your sin & make you right in His sight. Believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved.