

Confidence in the Lord Concerning You

2 Thessalonians 3:3-5

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Introduction

Last week in our sermon series from 2 Thessalonians, we looked at the first two verses of the third chapter.

- I told you that I had thought about looking at the first five verses, but that the subject was so important and there was so much packed into those first two verses,
 - that I had decided to focus our entire attention on them.
- Nevertheless, the flow of the passage calls for us to consider them along with the three verses we are looking at today.

So let me begin by reading the first five verses of 2 Thessalonians 3.

- Pay careful attention because this is the word of God.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5: Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run *swiftly* and be glorified, just as *it is* with you, ² and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one. ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. ⁵ Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy and infallible word.

As we saw last week, the important work to which the Holy Spirit calls us in these first two verses is prayer for those who minister the word of God.

- When Paul says, “pray for us,” he is asking prayer for him and his ministry companions.
 - And it is clear that his great concern is, as he says, “that the word of the Lord would run swiftly and be glorified.”
- Paul knew that apart from God’s help, their ministry was worthless.
 - God is the one who causes His word to spread—to run swiftly—and to be glorified...
 - As we saw last week, it is *glorified* when people give it the honour that it deserves as the very word of God.
 - That requires a work of God’s Spirit both in the one who preaches the word as well as in those who hear it.
 - And what a difference it makes when the word is glorified!
 - It causes people to believe it—to tremble at the threats, to take comfort and rest in the promises, to begin to grasp the majesty of God and the power of God and the wisdom of God and the grace of God...
 - and to see the marvellous work of redemption that He has accomplished in Jesus Christ and to respond to His gracious call to believe in Him for salvation.

- And Paul tells them to pray that no one will be able to hinder them in preaching the gospel—
 - that he and his ministry companions would be **delivered from unreasonable and wicked men** who rage against them with malice—trying to stop the gospel from spreading.
 - He reminds them that not all men have faith—
 - As he has been telling them, opposers like this often emerge within the church and lead those who profess Christ without really ever loving or believing the truth astray.
- Prayer is needed because it is a relentless battle...
 - with true ministers trying to spread the word that it might be glorified and with Satan and his minions trying their best to stop the spread of the gospel and to bring dishonour on it.
 - Only the Lord can make a difference.

But you will not pray unless you have confidence in the Lord—

- Without faith, you will not call on the name of the Lord because you will not believe that it will make any difference whether you do or not.
 - We don't pray as we ought because we lack confidence in the Lord.
- But there is help for us in our text today—in verses 3-5.
 - The Holy Spirit has given us these words so that we might have confidence in the Lord at the foundation of our prayers.
 - You know how Jesus and His apostles often speak about praying in faith—and how effective prayer is believing prayer.
 - It is not that you can ask for whatever you want and if you believe enough, get it.
 - No, it is a richer kind of faith than that.
 - It is faith that trusts God to do what is best for His glory and kingdom.
 - It is faith that recognises that He has promised to do certain things for us as His people and that He has willed to do many of those things in answer to our prayers.
 - In short, it is faith that has confidence in God as our gracious powerful Father.
- If you look over the three verses that are before us, you can see how Paul expresses this confidence in the Lord...
 - In verse 3, he says that God is faithful to build His church.
 - In verse 4, he says that he is confident that the Lord will grant obedience to them.
 - And in verse 5, he is so confident in the Lord that he actually asks Him to direct the hearts of His people into the love of God the patience of Christ.
- Today I want to unpack these verses for you—to expound them—with the prayer that God will stir up greater faith in you for real prayer...
 - not the half-hearted prayers that we so often engage in...
 - but prayers of faith, prayer offered by those who are confident in God.

So first of all,

I. Pray as someone who believes that God will build His church.

This is from verse 3: **But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.**

- A. Notice how God's faithfulness is set in contrast to those who have no faith...
- It says, "**But the Lord is faithful.**"
 - 1. Paul is concerned that when they say people come into the church and then fall away, it might call into question God's faithfulness in their minds.
 - They would see some departing from the faith and they would be tempted to say,
 - "Why has the Lord not answered our prayers to establish and guard His people?"
 - How is it that these have departed from us into unbelief?"
 - Paul had to deal with this with unbelieving Israel.
 - And His solution is the same as that of Christ—God is faithful to elect.
 - There is always a remnant of those who have true faith even when many others depart.
 - Jesus said He would lose none that the Father gave Him.
 - 2. Paul is saying this to encourage the Thessalonians to keep trusting God even though there will be those among them that end up not believing...
 - They can still count on the Lord to establish and guard them if they have true faith.
 - 3. He is saying this to encourage himself and them to pray.
 - Even though you see many turn away, do not let that dissuade you from praying for God to work in the church.
 - In fact, let that lead you to pray all the more, because you know that God will answer your prayers for His elect.
 - He has not been unfaithful.
 - The truth is, He stirs up prayer especially for His elect people, and He answers those prayers.
 - In times before apostasy, prayer often falls off.
 - But when He intends to preserve His people, He stirs up prayer for them.

TRANS> So...

- B. Count on God because He is faithful to establish us as His people.
- Consider what it means to establish them.
 - 1. The word *establish* means to set a thing in place so that it won't move.
 - a. This is the word that is used to describe the face of Jesus when the time came for Him to go to Jerusalem to be crucified...
 - His face was set like a flint to go.
 - b. This word *establish* is also translated *strengthen*.
 - It is used in Acts 15:41 of Paul going through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.
 - c. This idea of establishing or strengthening the churches was something that was always a priority with Paul.
 - In his first letter to the Thessalonians (in 3:2), he told them how he had agonised about them, and been compelled to send Timothy to *establish* them in the faith.

- In Acts 14:21-23, we are told how Paul returned to the places where he had preached the gospel to establish or strengthen the souls of the disciples...
2. This involves two things in particular.
 - a. First, it involves catechesis: **exhorting them to continue in the faith** (Act 14:22).
 - *The faith* is the body of truth that was preached and believed.
 - Paul was always catechising in the faith—
 - grounding disciples in the basics of the faith of the gospel, teaching about Christ and His work, teaching about prayer and about how a Christian is to worship and live in the world, teaching about the return of Christ... about election and the sovereignty of God.
 - He instructed Timothy to go to Ephesus and ensure that sound doctrine in accordance with the true faith was being taught there.
 - Error had crept in and there were some pastors and elders that needed to be corrected and perhaps removed.
 - b. Second, establishing disciples involves **appointing elders in every church** (Acts 14:23) to provide leadership...
 - appointing them to watch over the flock, to teach them, the disciple them and warn them and discipline them and guide them.
 - Paul ordained elders in every place for this purpose.
 - In his letter to Titus, he instructs them to ordain elders in every city of Crete where the gospel has gone.
 - It was a matter of great importance.
 3. But here in our text, Paul is telling us that it is the LORD who is faithful to establish churches!
 - a. That is why prayer is needed when we see people in the church who go astray.
 - We need to pray that those who believe would be established.
 - That the Lord would build His church, giving her officers and giving her sound doctrine.
 - b. Ultimately, it is Christ who does this according to His covenant promise to build His church.
 - He is the one who makes us and our leaders strong in faith.
 - Yes, there is labour to be done by men in establishing the church—Paul’s whole life was involved in that work...
 - yet, he knew better than anyone that it was only by God’s grace that he could establish churches.
 - c. We were just looking at Acts 14:21-23 where we saw how Paul established churches by exhorting them to continue the faith and by appointing elders,
 - but there was something else he did there as well...
 - **Acts 14:23: So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.**
 - Paul prayed and fasted for the churches for the same reason that we ought to pray and fast for them...
 - because it is the LORD alone who establishes them.

- As our text says, **He is faithful to establish you.**
- It is an ongoing work that we need and that He is faithful to do, especially in answer to our prayers.

TRANS> But look, Paul adds something else to inspire our prayers...

- Not only is the Lord faithful to establish us...

C. He is also faithful to guard us from the evil one.

1. We are in an endless warfare—as long as we are in this world.
 - Satan is going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.
 - We are not ignorant of his devices.
 - He stirs up division in the church over petty matters.
 - He raises up those who teach false doctrine to lead people astray.
 - He raises up those who live immoral lives and entice others to the same.
 - He seeks to condemn us and persuade us that God will not forgive us.
 - He tries to get us to doubt the goodness of God and to suppose we would be happier without Him.
2. How comforting it is to be told here that the Lord is faithful to watch over us with such an adversary!
 - We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.
 - The subject of Psalm 121 that we sang earlier is about this very matter of keeping us, watching us, and guarding us...
 - This is the word that is used six times in the Greek translation of Ps 121.
 - The Lord is our keeper.
 - He does not establish His church and then abandon it to the wolves.
 - Jesus said that He would not let one of those that Father had given to Him perish, but would keep them to the end.
3. This doesn't mean that we can leave it to Him as if we have no part to play though.
 - a. His primary way of guarding us is by using us to guard each other.
 - He makes our watchfulness effective.
 - He watches us by enabling us to watch over each other.
 - b. That means that we must be watchful...
 - Elders must guard the flock that has been entrusted to them.
 - Parents must watch over their children and know how they are doing in their walk with Christ—where their heart is with God.
 - Friends and spouses must guard each other in the faith and stir each other up if anyone is dragging along.
 - c. But above all, we must pray that the Lord will guard us from the evil one.
 - Jesus told us to pray for this in the Lord's Prayer,
 - And Paul is encouraging it here in our text.
 - He is telling us of the faithfulness of God to guard us in order to encourage us to continue in steadfast prayer.

TRANS> So I say again, pray as someone who is confident that the it is the Lord who builds His church...

- And now let's move on to verse 4 where we are taught to...

II. Pray as someone who is confident that it is God who enables us to obey.

- Verse 4 says: **And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you.**

A. Paul is talking to the Thessalonians like a parent or a teacher who says to a child, “Now I know that I can count on you to do what I have told you.”

1. Expressing confidence that someone will obey you is an encouragement to obedience.
 - When you know that someone who is in authority over you has confidence in you, it has a way of spurring you on.
 - It is not pleasant to disappoint a parent or a teacher who is counting on you.
2. It is a great thing when pastors and elders are able to say this with confidence...
 - When there are people that you are sure of—you know that they will be faithful and you can tell them so.
 - But what if you are someone that is not like that?
 - What if you are a child that always makes your parents uneasy?
 - Sometimes children will complain that their parents don’t trust them...but more often than not, there is good reason for that!
 - Yes, parents can be paranoid—but if you have shown yourself to be earnest for the Lord...
 - If you come to your parents and ask forgiveness for your sin even when they don’t know that you have sinned...
 - And if they see you looking for ways to please the Lord—they will almost always become confident in you.
 - I love it my children grow up to the point where I can be sure of them—where they are managing their own walk with God.
 - This is something for us all to aim for—that those in authority over us will be able to say, “I have confidence that you will do what I have commanded.”

TRANS> But note what Paul has added to this his confidence...the words *in the Lord*.

B. Note that he says, “I have confidence *in the Lord* concerning you both that you do and will do the things we command you.”

1. Paul’s confidence is not so much in the Thessalonians as it is in the Lord.
 - The LORD is the one who called them into His kingdom and enabled them to obey His call in the first place—to obey the glorious gospel of Christ.
 - He is the one whose workmanship they are, **created in Christ Jesus for good works** (Eph 2:10).
 - He is the one who (Titus 2:14) **gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.**
 - And He is the one who is presently at work in them, to enable them both to will and to do what is pleasing to Him (Phil 2:13).
2. And as believers, we know that we also can only obey by God’s grace.

- It is God who by His Spirit opens the eyes to understand His will—His commandments as Paul refers to them..
 - And then by His Spirit He also enables us to follow through with obedience to the glory of God.
 - And we have confidence in the Lord that those who give evidence that God is at work in them—the way the Thessalonians did—will continue to obey Him.
 - Our confidence is in the Lord.
3. That is why this is another encouragement to pray.
- Since God is the one that enables us and other believers to obey, we should, as Paul so often does, pray that we and our fellow believers will obey...
 - Colossians 1:9-11: **For this reason we also, since the day we heard it [that they had come to Christ], do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power...**

TRANS> So we pray as those who believe that God establishes and guards His people, and we pray as those who believe that God enables us to obey...

- And now we come to verse 5 in which we are given grounds to...

III. Pray as someone who believes that our God is a God who is able to direct peoples' hearts into what is good.

A. You see in verse 5 that Paul has confidence that God is able to direct the hearts of His people.

1. He expresses his wish that God will do this in the form of a prayer...
 - **2 Thess 3:5: Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.**
 - Solomon expresses a similar confidence, in 1 Chronicles 29:18 when he prays:
 - **“O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the intent of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and fix their heart toward You.”**
2. What a God we serve—a God who directs hearts in the way they should go.
 - If this were not so, there would be no hope for us at all.
 - But because it is so, let us join with Paul and Solomon in praying that God will direct the hearts of His people.

TRANS> Following our text...

B. Ask Him specifically to direct the heart of each one of us into **the love of God**.

1. This is needed because since the fall, we don't naturally love God.
 - We were drawn in by Satan to question His love—
 - to doubt His goodness and whether it is best for us to have Him as our God.
 - What blasphemy it is to doubt such things about Him...
 - What blindness and hard heartedness it requires...
 - But it is in all of us since the fall.

2. But there is so much to love about God...
 - a. He is a glorious and beautiful being, a majestic holy being who is without spot or blemish.
 - He is filled with goodness and love, even within Himself as a triune being from all eternity.
 - There has been such a mutual delight, such a joy, such affection between the three persons—it is truly a grand thing.
 - b. As our Creator, He, in His love, made the whole world for us...
 - It was His gift to us—and what a place it is—filled with beautiful treasures, delightful creatures, magnificent things like fresh water and sunshine—trees and flowers—lions and sparrows and dolphins...
 - fresh fruit and fresh shrimp...
 - And from the beginning, He gave us language by which He revealed Himself to us...
 - He walked with us in the garden, making Himself and His will known to us.
 - He gave us marriage and parenting, touching and loving and living and serving and building and discovering and science and math.
 - c. But above all His love is seen in His redeeming grace.
 - We were ruined by sin beyond repair—condemned and justly sentenced to eternity in Hell...
 - But He did not leave us all to perish.
 - In His great love, He sent His only Son into the world to become flesh—truly one of us in body and spirit, yet the second person of the trinity...
 - And in our substance He lived the model life, the beautiful life of love and service to God and to others that we were originally created to live.
 - What a beautiful thing it was—as He considered others more important than Himself and gave Himself for them.
 - Even while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
 - This is love, not that we loved Him, but that He loved us and gave Himself to be a propitiation for our sins...
 - A propitiation—that which turns away God’s holy wrath...
 - That which turns away God’s holy wrath by letting it all fall upon Him as the one who was sacrificed for our sins.
 - This is the love God—that He spared not His Son, and that the Son spared not Himself—
 - And that He calls us to full forgiveness and eternal life simply by trusting in Him as the one who was condemned for us.
3. Oh that God would direct our hearts into His love!
 - a. As Paul puts in Ephesians 3:16-19: **that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

- What a thing to have this knowledge of the love of God!
 - What a thing to be able to pray that God would do for us!
- b. Do this kindness for your brothers and sisters—pray that God would direct their hearts into His love.
- The more our hearts are directed into His love, the more we will be able to love each other.
 - This love is so beautiful... and when our hearts are directed into it to see it in our Lord God,
 - He will also direct them into the love of God for each other—into loving each other with this love with which we have been loved.
- c. Ask God for this...
- He is able to do it—and He will do it for His people.

TRANS> And besides that...

C. Ask Him to direct the hearts of each one us into **the patience of Christ.**

1. What is “the patience of Christ”?
 - The word *patience* in the original is *hoop-om-on-ay*.
 - *hoopo* means *under*
 - *monay* means *place of abode, or place of dwelling...*
 - So that idea is that you are patient in the sense that you remain under, you maintain your loyalty when things are hard.
 - In the New Testament, it speaks of a person who is not swerved in his loyalty to his faith and service to God by even the greatest trials and sufferings.
 - The *patience of Christ* is the patience of the cross.
 - The patience that kept Him loyal to the Father through the most severe trial that anyone will ever have to endure—bearing the sin of the world for us to have pardon.
 - How beautifully devoted and unstoppable He was.
2. And the prayer here is that this same *patience of Christ* would belong to us from the heart!
 - a. The Thessalonians were suffering severe persecution from people they loved—day after day, week after week, month after month...
 - And Paul prays, you see, that God will direct their hearts into the patience of Christ.
 - God can do that for His people! How wonderful it is!
 - b. We have brothers and sisters in our congregation who are suffering.
 - Some with physical infirmities that never seem to go away.
 - Some with broken relationships that never seem to heal.
 - Some with temptation that continues to pound them.
 - Some with financial pressures that are heavy upon them.
 - Some with children that are lost and do not know Christ.
 - Some with deep scars from past sins that they have committed.
 - Some with deep scars from abuse and wrong done to them.

- c. But they can be blessed with hearts directed into the patience of Christ!
 - A heart of such loyalty that it says, “not my will but yours be done!”
 - A heart of such loyalty that it says:
 - “this too for the glory of God” or
 - “this for the rest of my life for the glory of God” or
 - “this for the good of Christ’s kingdom.”
 - A heart that looks at the abuses of the past and says:
 - “here I had a part in bearing the wrath of God against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men in the world...”
 - “Let God be praised for His righteousness and goodness, for it is only small taste of what I deserved and still deserve...”
 - “And but a small taste of what Christ bore for me.”
 - Pray that the patience of Christ will fill the hearts of us all—
 - that it would swallow up all bitterness and resentment and set those in bondage free.
 - that it will enable us to go on for the Lord with fierce loyalty no matter what we may face in the days to come...
 - knowing that because Christ has endured for us,
 - our sufferings are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.
 - They are preparing us to know God better in glory.

Conclusion:

What a marvellous thing it is to have a God who is:

- faithful to establish and guard His church,
- to grant to His people obedience,
- to direct our very hearts into His love and into the patience of Christ.

This is the God to whom Paul so frequently prays,

- and the God to whom the Holy Spirit directs us to pray.

What a privilege it is to lift one another up to Him!

- And with what confidence can we do so.