

Perhaps you read about this... and was as amazed as I was. ... Intel recently employed a futurist... named Brian David Johnson... whose job is to determine what life will be like ten to fifteen years from now. ... Johnson said this about the necessity of his job:

*It takes around 10-15 years to design, build and deploy a new chip. This is why Intel needed someone who can look 10-15 years into the future and tell them what the world they are designing for will be like. The work that I do is very pragmatic. I am judged on my ability to tell people what is coming so they can do something about it.*

When I read about Intel's desire to know the future – so they can be actively working toward it – I wondered how the church (today) should be actively working toward - what we actually know (not think) is coming.

The Apostle Paul has been peering into the future with his first two letters to the Thessalonians. Here in his second letter (which we will conclude today)... he has foreseen and foretold both the increasing spirit of rebellion (already at work in the world)... with it's ultimate climax with the Antichrist... but also his overthrow with just a word at the return of Christ. ... He has also indicated that meanwhile... the ever-increasing lawlessness around us is being restrained. ... And I have preached why I believe 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 indicates that restraint is the Holy Spirit's presence in His church. Once the church is raptured... lawlessness will no longer be restrained... and the Antichrist will appear on the world stage.

We have many indicators that we are living at a time when all of this is about to happen. ... But the Thessalonians also believed that the time was imminent to their day (2,000 years ago.) And in today's passage we will see how several believers did the wrong thing with such a belief. They

were so busy looking up and passively waiting for the Lord — that they were neglecting God’s clear instructions for their daily lives. ... So Paul sought to correct them by what he wrote in today’s passage.

The title of today’s message is: “*What to Do While Waiting.*” Without giving too much away (this early in the message)... let me just say... a believer who is looking for the Lord to return is not a dreamer – he/she is an **active** worker!

Too many in the church of Thessalonica were living by the motto: “*I love ministry! - I can sit around and watch it all day long!*” ... These believers had forgotten a vital truth: Christianity is an active... involved faith. ... (LISTEN!)... By accepting Scripture’s invitation to know what is about to happen... we’re also accepting personal involvement in carrying out God’s sovereign purposes.

Paul’s direct address to those living irresponsibly (in light of Christ’s soon return) is strong and decisive. ... In fact... he begins not with a **request**... nor an **encouragement**... nor (even) an **exhortation**... but rather with a “**command**.” ... Clearly Paul has such serious concerns about what to do while waiting... (and it is even a greater concern NOW – because it *really is* so close)... that Paul gave no effort to be subtle. He is blunt... saying: “*Do this ... and do it **now!***” ... He calls them to prayer – for a very specific thing... using quite a vivid image!

## **2 Thes 3:1**

Look at that last phrase: “*as happened among you...*” It is clear that when Paul first preached in Thessalonica there were spectacular results. Their 3-4 week ministry in Thessalonica was un-like any other place they went to.

... Many were speedily **converted**. The Gospel message was well-received... many were converted... and a church was born in a very uncommon period of only 3-4 short weeks. (We read about it in Acts 17.) ... It is this kind of free movement of the word of God that Paul asks them to pray would happen more often.

Paul used the same imagery that the Psalmist did in Ps.147.

**Psalm 147:15-20 (ESV)**

*<sup>15</sup> He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.  
<sup>16</sup> He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes. <sup>17</sup> He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs; who can stand before his cold?  
<sup>18</sup> He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow and the waters flow. <sup>19</sup> He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. <sup>20</sup> He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules. Praise the LORD!*

God's servants may be bound, but God's Word will not be bound! Paul explicitly says this in his letter to Timothy...

**2 Timothy 2:9 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!*

So... here's a question: ... If this is such a sure thing... (a definite certainty) why are we to pray for it? ... **[ P A U S E ]** ...

The first thing that I want to say is... 2 Thessalonians 3:1 gives tremendous significance to praying for WHAT IS ALREADY CERTAIN TO HAPPEN.

But let's do a little thinking about this and Paul's specific request...

The word of the Lord is pictured as an athlete... running in a race to achieve the glory of winning. (The Apostle loved to use dramatic figures of speech.) Here God's word is personified as trying to win... which means

being acclaimed as superior to all the others in a race. The other competitors are each of the world's philosophies... and theories... and worldviews. The word of the Lord is running against the world's well-accepted words of wisdom. (And here is what Paul presents to us.) The word of the Lord will be recognized and acclaimed as superior to all other words and philosophies – **IF WE PRAY !** Look once more how Paul phrases it: “*pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored...*”

God **will** – indeed – cause His word to be glorified. We see that in the verses that we just read together (Ps. 147 and 2 Tim 2:9). ... But... (now – get this!) He does not intend to win... without giving YOU a part in the victory!!! Apparently... God does not intend to win the race of words – without the prayers of His people.

(Oh! Please hear me clearly!)... If you are wondering how you can make a significant impact for the Lord... with your life – here it is! Devote yourself (from here on out) to praying for the word of God to run and be glorified. The Lord will be victorious – and YOU with it!

There are a lot of things that people devote their life to accomplish. Some want to write a great novel... others see it as a very high accomplishment to build a Fortune 500 Company... coach a Superbowl championship team... or find the cure for cancer. These would all be very glorious achievements... wouldn't they?

But let's just pretend **you** had achieved one of these glories. ... In the Book of James... we read that our life here on earth... is like a mist that

appears for a little while – and then is gone. Earthly life is like a steamy breath that you let out while walking to your car on a cold January morning. (It only lasts about two seconds.) ... So think of it... once we get to eternity... (the age to come) *your glorious earthly achievement* (however great) will only be like two seconds. Nobody should get excited about a two-second glory. ... Especially when you have available to you an opportunity that isn't two seconds. You have an opportunity for glory that lasts forever!

Once we stand before the judgment seat of Christ... the novel you wrote will be gone... the Fortune 500 company will have no value... the Superbowl – a faded memory (at best).. the cure for cancer – completely irrelevant now. ... But off to the side will be Frank Smith. Frank was a Christian who had spent 30 minutes a day on his knees praying that the word of the Lord would run and be glorified. Frank's victory... Frank's achievement... Frank's glory - will last FOREVER!

Anyone who yearns for significance... 2 Thessalonians is an exciting verse for you. *Dedicating yourself to pray for the word of God to run and be glorified* brings greater glory than any great achievement on earth can do.

Believers! This kind of praying is a high calling. I believe that there are many who are listening today of whom *THIS* is the kind of significance you have been longing for. ... So let's do some more thinking from our passage about the kind of prayer Paul is calling you to... as we wait for Christ's return.

## **2 Thes. 3:2**

(Let me ask you something!) ... How many of you believe that Biblical preaching (proclamation of God's Word)... is not merely a human activity undertaken by human energy and ingenuity...? ... I know that it is **not!** ... Unseen spiritual forces are also at work. (Hence this call to prayer.) ... Evil men oppose the gospel and behind them stands the evil one. - But behind the bearers of the Lord's message stands the faithful Lord.

Now... go back with me and look again at the last sentence of verse 2.

### **2 Thes 3:2b**

When Paul writes: "*For not all have faith*"... it is actually "**the** faith." All men do not have the faith. Those men that Paul refers to - do not hold to the doctrines as the apostles taught them. (Stop and think!) This can only mean that Paul is discussing church members. ... (Ye-ah!) Paul is asking that they would pray for him to be delivered from THOSE WHO WERE IN THE CHURCH! There were wicked and evil men in the church that were preventing the Gospel to go forth.

Rather than **ME** say it... I think I will let J Vernon McGee pick-up on this:

*My friend, let me urge you to pray for your pastor. Let me say something very carefully. I know what it is to be a pastor... ... A pastor has a great responsibility because, very frankly, he deals with a great many folk who are unreasonable. Paul asks prayer that he "may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men." Did you know that there are wicked persons in the church? A pastor needs to be delivered from such folk.*

Was Paul praying for his troubles to be removed? ... I made such a big deal last week saying that Paul **never** prayed for those who were being persecuted to have it removed? ... Uh oh! Did I misspeak...? Doesn't

Paul ask the Thessalonians to pray that way (right here)? ... Was I wrong last week in leading you to believe that it may not be the right way to pray for someone who is suffering a hardship?

Do not misunderstand the verse. Paul is not asking for prayer for no persecution. That would be entirely contrary to the New Testament. After all... elsewhere Paul himself says: *“All who live godly lives will suffer persecution.”* ... And Jesus Himself taught in John 16: *“If they persecuted me, they’ll persecute you.”*

Paul is not trying to duck any of that (here). ... But let’s recount Paul’s experience in Europe so far. ... He first arrived in Philippi and started preaching. Very soon he was thrown in jail... beaten badly... and had to leave before he could establish very much. ... In that sense... the gospel had been hindered. ... But when he got to Thessalonica... and only lasted no more than four weeks before the riots started... the Gospel spread very quickly – un-hindered.

In Philippi... Paul was persecuted and the gospel had been hindered. ... But in Thessalonica (where he also suffered persecution)... the Gospel was un-hindered. This is prayer that the gospel will not be hindered - not that he will escape any sort of suffering... Do you see? *“Pray that God’s Word will win the race... as it did in Thessalonica. In praying for this... ask that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men who want to hinder it.”*

The apostle wanted all hindrances to the gospel swept aside that it might make rapid progress in the world. ... And that is exactly what we should be praying for. ... I think that I will let J Vernon McGee speak again for me:

*I find that the spreading of the gospel is hindered more by people in the church than by anything else. No liquor industry, no barroom, no gangster ring has ever attacked me—at least I have never known about it. But I have had so-called saints in the churches attack me. As you know, in our churches we have the saints and the “ain’ts,” and there are a lot of “ain’ts.” They can give a pastor a rough time.*

As we wait for Christ to return... pray for God’s Word to win the race. Pray that it will significantly win here in La Pine... in Oregon... and our nation. Pray that our missionaries would see God’s Word be victorious. ... Please pray for me (as your pastor) to be unhindered in proclaiming God’s truth. Pray for our youth leaders (Eric... Vreyah... and Reyvah.)

Satan is a skilled player on life’s chessboard. He knows how to move his men to check the advance of the gospel. But prayer can annul even his formidable advantages... and he is no match for the Holy Spirit.

### **2 Thes 3:3**

God does not exempt His people from the natural disasters and ills of life. He does not promise immunity from being disliked... suffering unfair discrimination...persecution... or even death. ... But what He **does** promise is that He will establish us and ground us on His truth.

As we wait for Christ to return... pray for God’s Word to win the race of words. Devote yourself to such praying. ... But there is something else that Paul moves to... something else to do while we wait. ... The apostle moves from the need to spread the word in the world... to the need to **obey** the word in the church... (from evangelism to obedience.)

What is striking (as we move on)... is not so much the instructions which Paul issues in these next verses... as the authority with which he does so.



Nothing is more impressive in this chapter than the repetition of the verbs 'command' and 'obey'. 'There is a military ring' about these verses.

### **2 Thes 3:4**

I have been allowing J Vernon McGee to interject his thoughts... Now I think that I will allow Warren Wiersbe to do the same:

*The word "command" that Paul used in 2 Thessalonians 3:4 means "a military order passed down from a superior officer." ... In a battle, it is not enough for only the officers to fight; every man must do his duty. This is also true in the work of the local church.*

*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.*

### **2 Thes 3:5**

They will need the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ resonating in their hearts... in order to obey the commands Paul is about to give them. The steadfastness of Christ is needed to level out the mountain-to-valley emotional extremes that come with the situation Paul is about to address. And the love of God has to be obvious in the actions Paul will command them to take.

Here is what I would like for you to notice in this rather lengthy section of verses... that we will read next. Even though Paul will make several points... there is one issue that these verses are dealing with. This section of his letter is about church discipline. He initiates the topic... delivers

insights on a few tangents... and keeps coming right back to church discipline as the main point.

## 2 Thes 3:6-15

The church in Thessalonica had its problems... just like any church. In this section we learn NOT ONLY about how to deal with the problem that was going on with THEM... but also how to deal with any sin in the church where a member(s) is being obstinate by openly and defiantly disobeying God's Word – and it is negatively affecting the church's ministry. ... Keep in mind that Paul initiated this discussion by calling for them to manifest the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ... in verse 5.

What was the problem at Thessalonica? ... Some members of the assembly had misinterpreted Paul's teachings about the return of Christ. They left their jobs and were living off the generosity of the church. ... They were idle slackers while others were working. ... Yet they expected the church to support them. ... They were defiant! Obstinate! I say this because Paul had already addressed the in his first letter.

You may remember (when we studied 1 Thessalonians)... my explanation about those who Paul referred to as "atoktoi." He uses the same term here in these verses. The term ("atoktoi") in Greek was a military term that referred to unruly soldiers who were out of rank. "Atoktoi" is a very good word for Paul to use here. These were so unruly... and out of rank... that they were also spreading gossip about people in the church. They had time on their hands and gossip on their lips. ... Action needed to be taken!

When problems are not solved... they grow and become worse. A sliver left in the finger can become infected and cause a toxic condition so serious

that surgery may become necessary. ... If you tell your doctor that you stepped on a rusty nail... he will immediately give you a tetanus shot... even though the wound may appear insignificant to you.

Church problems are like physical problems: if left unsolved... they grow and become worse... and they infect more people. ...The local church is a body; and what germs are to the physical body... sin is to the spiritual body. **Any** open... defiant... "*I-don't-care-what-God's-Word-says*" sin - must be handled with the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ!

You know (as well as I do) that church discipline is not administered very often today. It is viewed with distaste... and thought of as NON-loving. Jesus (and Paul) were of a different opinion... however. Both command it. We see it here... in Matthew 18... Galatians 6:1... and 1 Cor. 5... for example. And in our passage today... we are given some practical guidelines on how it should be exercised with the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ. Let me suggest five... that we see in our passage.

**#1. Church discipline should generally be reserved for matters affecting the health or well-being of the entire church community.** It is not for petty issues of difference between members.

In the middle of Paul's instruction about how to discipline the "atoktoi"... Paul breaks away in verse 13...

## **2 Thes 3:13**

The faithful Christians were discouraged by the conduct of the careless saints who refused to work. "If *they* don't have to work, why should *we*?" There was probably a significant hesitation to help other Christians who had a **legitimate** need. Feeling **drained** by the ones who **could** work... but

chose not to... it would be easy to abandon **all** acts of benevolence. They knew that they were being played for the sucker... (being ripped off.) ... Paull writes: “No... no... no. *That’s the wrong response to this church-wide problem... Do not grow weary in doing good where the need is genuine... Instead I want you to administer church discipline on the ones affecting ministry so negatively...*”

**#2.** *It should be reserved for clear cases of defiance.* The apostle had already admonished them in his first letter – but they grew worse... becoming gossips. They were quite **bold** with their disobedience.

**#3.** *The nature of church discipline which Paul commanded was a measure of ostracism.* Loyal church members were to keep aloof from them.

#### **2 Thes 2:14**

**#4.** *The spirit in which church discipline is to be administered must be friendly – not hostile.* It is to be done gently. \_Look at verse 15 again.

#### **2 Thes 3:15**

**#5.** *The purpose of this discipline is positive and constructive.* It is not to humiliate delinquents... and even less... to destroy them. ... It is rather to make them ‘feel ashamed’ so they will repent ... There’s a fine line between putting a person to shame and shaming a person. ... When a person is put to shame... the individual feels sorry for those sins and laments the pain caused to others. Such a repentant person eventually seeks to make things right. ... Shaming a person... however... leaves little room for repentance and restoration. It tends to be spiteful and vindictive... rather than redemptive.

You know... one of the reasons... (perhaps)... church discipline is not exercised today... is church members may feel “*what’s the use?*” ... It isn’t like it was during the first century where a community only had **ONE** church. Ostracism may have worked when there was no other church to run off and join. ... “*You won’t accept me here... OK... I’ll move my membership up the road. No big deal...*”

But please look at the instructions Jesus Himself gave for church discipline in Matthew 18. There is an answer to this.

**Matthew 18:15-18 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> “*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.* <sup>16</sup> *But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.* <sup>17</sup> *If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.* <sup>18</sup> *Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

“*Whatever you bind on earth shall be...*” WHAT? – “*bound in heaven...*” A person who thinks it is no big deal when a church legitimately exercises church discipline should take note. Yes... you can go to another church up the road... but church discipline has a binding authority in heaven that is only loosened when the church loosens it. God can still make the disciplinary effect work... and I think this verse says that He **will**... whenever a church does it properly. The disciplined person can still be *shamed into repentance* - by God Himself! (Ostracism by the disciplining church is not the ONLY tool available to God.) ... [ P A U S E ... ]

What should we be doing as we wait for Jesus to return...?

Join the work of the church by praying for its efforts in proclaiming God's Word. Earnestly ask for it to be unhindered. ... If the only involvement you have in prayer... is the time each Sunday that you sit in church... that's not joining the work of the church ... that's neglecting the work!

So commit yourself to expanding your regular... daily prayer time to include prayer for our church... Pray for your pastor and youth workers... Pray also for our Bible study leaders and KIDS church workers! ... If you don't pray at all... would you begin by praying for at least a few minutes a day. ... If you already pray for five minutes... aim for fifteen. ... If you are right now praying for fifteen... make thirty minutes your new goal.

While we wait for Christ's return – SECOND – join the work of the church through obedience. What comes to mind is this:

**1 Peter 4:10 (ESV)**

*<sup>10</sup> As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:*

Are you using your spiritual gift in the way He intends – to build up the body of Christ...? ... [ P A U S E ] ... ..

While history moves towards its completion... and we await the return of Christ... can you say from the heart '*Let the Word of the Lord run and be honored throughout the world*' ... and '*Let the Word of the Lord be honored and obeyed in the church*'?

**2 Thes 3:16-18**