

Study 10: 2nd Thessalonians Chapter 3

Introduction

The third chapter closes the second letter with primarily exhortation. The Thessalonian church was primarily faithful, although there was a problem with idleness and disorder with some of them. They were however, still facing external persecution, and the faithfulness of the Lord is presented in contrast to that of those who were troubling them.

Body of the Study

Exhortation for prayers

Second Benediction

Instructions towards the disorderly

Their example whilst in Thessalonica

The busybodies

Implementing discipline

Third benediction

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *In this chapter, Paul discusses how to deal with some people who were idle and would not work. How should we apply these principles in the church today? What do you think this means in regards to people who are on the dole?*
 - *What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Thessalonian church?*
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- Read the notes as a review of the study.
 - Read the whole book in a single sitting.

Notes for study 10: Chapter 3

Introduction

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Body of the Study

Exhortation for prayers

Paul's use of "finally" is an indication that he has dealt with the main issues under consideration, or that he is now moving on to address another issue. In this case, it is both. He has given further discussion on the Lord's return, and he now gives some further instruction regarding the things that were happening within the congregation.

As well as praying for the Thessalonians (1:1:2; 2:1:3), Paul also requests that they pray for them (Paul, Silas, and Timothy). However, his request is not for the personal profit or benefit of Paul and his associates, but rather that their work in the Gospel might prosper. The gospel had been flourishing in Thessalonica, and it was Paul's desire that it would likewise do so in Corinth. "*...pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, just as it is with you...*" (2:3:1 NKJV).

Paul was facing some challenges in Corinth from the Jews (Acts 18:12-13), just as they had rebelled against him at Thessalonica and then followed him to Berea. It is likely that this event happened some time after Paul wrote the Thessalonian letter, so it is probably not the one that he has in mind. ["*when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia*" describes a short period of time beginning on July 1st 52AD. Luke's description of the event seems to indicate that it occurred after Paul had been in Corinth for 18 months (Acts 18:11-12). The persecution against Paul arose when the new proconsul took office.] Paul writes "*...that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith...*" (2:3:2 NKJV). Regardless of who it was that was inflicting the persecution, they were outside of the church.

In contrast to the persecutors who did not have faith, "*...the Lord is faithful...*" (2:3:3). The Lord Jesus is the one Paul has in mind (in other places he says God is faithful (1 Cor 1:9; 1 Cor 10:13; 2 Cor 1:18), although it makes no difference to the argument). The contrast is with the unfaithful persecutors and the faithful God "*...who will establish you and guard you from the evil one...*" (2:3:3 NKJV).

The Thessalonians had grown and abounded in their lives as christians, and Paul expected that this would continue. They had listened and taken notice of the things that Paul has said and taught them – well at least some of them had!!! [Some of them hadn't, because they were loafing around despite their instruction on Paul's visit AND those in the first letter.] Paul is patting them on the back and priming them up to continue to put things into practice. "*...And now we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you...*" (3:3:4 NKJV).

Second Benediction

Paul pronounces the second benediction in the letter (the first is in 2:2:16-17) as he builds on the instruction and exaltation that he has just given them. He is outlining the things that he is praying about for them "*...may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ...*" (2:3:5 NKJV).

This “has reference to the patience which Christ, while on earth manifested in the midst of adversity. The prayer is to the effect that the hearts of the Thessalonians will be directed into a greater realization of this endurance which will quite naturally produce within them a similar kind of endurance.”¹

Instructions towards the disorderly

Some in the church were not pulling their weight. Apparently, they had taken the view that *the Lord is coming back soon, so why should we go out to work? Let's just sit around and wait until He returns.* This flows on to *how are they going to be fed and supported?* Of course, what happened was that some of them had to support those who refused to work.

Cam LaSpina (an old and faithful brother in Innisfail, Nth Queensland) tells of the time during the Second World War, when the Japanese were heading down from the north to invade Australia. A plan was put in place for “The Brisbane Line” where no invasion south of Brisbane would be tolerated, and that territory would be held at all cost. [As it turned out, they were held back in New Guinea, although some attacks on the north did take place]. Many of the farmers at the time just gave up planting their sugar cane crops, and said, “what’s the point of all that labour if we’re going to have to give it up anyway”. Like the Thessalonians, with the expectation of a major event happening, they had stopped doing the things that they needed to do to sustain their livelihood.

Paul commanded that the congregation come to order. This was not something new, nor something that was unexpected “...for even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat...” (2:3:10 NKJV). Paul (and Silas and Timothy) had given quite clear instruction on their visit to Thessalonica. Not only had they provided the instruction whilst they were there, but they had shown by example how these things should be. “...For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you...nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labour and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you...to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us...” (2:3:7-9 NKJV).

So, Paul had given them the example, and an instruction whilst there. Then in the first letter he wrote “...But we urge you, brethren...that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands as we commanded you...” (1:4:10-11 NKJV). And “...Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly...” (1:5:14 NKJV).

Despite the instructions and the warnings, those who were causing trouble had not changed their behaviour, and it was now time for stronger action. The purpose of discipline is not to punish the person (God will see to that), but rather to bring them back into a proper behaviour. Paul’s warning is now strong “...But we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (2:3:6 NKJV). This was clearly not just Paul’s judgement, but Paul spoke with the clear authority (in the name of) from the Lord. Further, this was not something optional – it was a commandment. In order to modify the behaviour of those people, the church was to “...withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly...” (2:3:6 NKJV). They could not remain in fellowship and continue with their inappropriate behaviour. They had to make a choice. What God wanted was for them to remain in fellowship and to continue with appropriate behaviour. But the choice was theirs. If they would not change their behaviour, then they had to have the fellowship broken. This was clearly “...according to the tradition which you received from us...” (2:3:6 NKJV). The word for tradition is *paradosis* (as in 2:2:15) and is translated *teaching* in some versions. Paul is not teaching that we should do things because of tradition (ie because that is the way that we have always done it), but rather because we have apostolic authority to do it, and that was what they had been taught.

¹ Kelcy Raymond C “The letters of Paul to the Thessalonians” The Living Word Commentary, p174

Their example whilst in Thessalonica

Whilst Paul, Silas and Timothy were in Thessalonica, they did not take wages from the church there, although it would have been quite proper for them to do so, since they did it in other places, and *those who teach the gospel should earn their living from the gospel* (1 Cor 9:14). They earned their living and “...worked with toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you...” (2:3:8 NKJV), and the church at Philippi sent support to them on at least two occasions - probably more (Php 4:15-16). [Both of these things together suggest a stay in Thessalonica of much longer than *three sabbath days* (Acts 17:2) – probably more like 3 months. The *three sabbath days* was the time that Paul spent in the synagogue, not the time in the city.]

Paul must have been led by inspiration to know where to accept support, and where to reject it. As it turned out, had he taken support whilst in Thessalonica, he would have had some difficulty in admonishing those who were taking support from others whilst loafing around. His example was crystal clear “...we made ourselves an example of how you should follow us...” (2:3:9).

The command is clear “...if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat...” (2:3:10 NKJV). Those who were loafing around were looking for others for support and becoming an unnecessary burden on them. Paul is not condemning those who can't work (due to age or disability etc), but those who will not work.

The busybodies

Some who refused to work had too much time on their hands and started to make trouble for the others who were working. They were “...in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies...” (2:3:11 NKJV). Paul presents a play on words in describing them. In essence, he says that *they have no business of their own, but are doing everybody's business*.

Like the exhortation previously given, Paul commands them to work in quietness, and to provide their own food. He has also given these instructions previously whilst in Thessalonica, and in the first letter (1:4:11).

Implementing discipline

Those who continued to rebel were to be disciplined. “...If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother...” (2:3:14-15 NIV). Such a person needs to be withdrawn from. Jesus gave some specific instruction on such a process in Matt 18:15-17. Those in Thessalonica had reached the stage where the church needed to take action. The aim was to bring him back into fellowship and *admonish him*.

Third benediction

Paul now closes the final section of the letter with a prayer “...may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all...” (2:3:16 NKJV). The situation in the church in Thessalonica was not peaceful. They were persecuted by the Jews from the outside, but there was also the turmoil on the inside. Paul understood their need for peace, and they could be assured that the Lord brings peace through reconciliation (Eph 2:15; 1 Cor 14:33).

Paul concludes the letter with his personal salutation. As with most of Paul's letters, they were written by a scribe (in this case probably Timothy or Silas). Paul put his own seal of approval and authenticity on the letter by signing it and writing a short personal greeting in his own hand writing. [It is a bit like our christmas letters that we have photocopied, and then we write a short personal greeting to the recipients in our own handwriting.]