

Paul's Desire for the Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians 3:1-5
Part One

We are now looking at **2 Thess. 3:1-5**. These verses provide a little interlude in the midst of the letter. This interlude is very personal. Paul is sharing with the Thessalonians what he expects from them. Paul is telling the Thessalonians what he cherished in terms of their Christian conduct. Certainly, they had expectations of him and his companions, but they also had expectations concerning them.

This continues to be true even today. The people in a church have expectations of their leaders, and their leaders have certain expectations of the people.

What might the people expect from their leaders? That they would be men of high moral character. We see this clearly spelled out in **1 Timothy 3** and also in **Titus 1**. They would expect them to be committed to shepherding the church. In **1 Peter 5:2** it says, **"Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness."** They would, according to **Acts 20:27**, expect them in their shepherding role to teach the whole counsel of the word of God. All of these expectations are reasonable and righteous expectations. These are expectations that you should have for the leaders in this church.

Relationships are a two-way street. Therefore, not only did the Thessalonians righteously have expectations of Paul and his companions, but Paul and his companions also had expectations of them. Paul takes time in these verses to detail out for the Thessalonians four different desires, or expectations, that he had for them.

Hopefully, as we examine these expectations you might examine your own lives. The expectation that Paul has for the Thessalonians, that he expresses in these verses, are no different than the expectations that the leaders of Valley Bible have in respect to yourselves.

THAT THEY WOULD BE PRAYERFUL

Let us read **V. 1**, **"Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you, (2) and that we would be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith."** Paul had just prayed for the Thessalonians. He had prayed for them that their hearts might be comforted and strengthened in every good work and word. Having prayed for them, he now asks the Thessalonians to pray for them. These men Paul, Silas and Timothy were no slouches. These were gifted men, and yet he is asking for prayer.

Why would he do this? These men obviously were men of significant natural ability. Why would men of such great intellect and personal skills be asking for prayer? It would seem that if anyone would need prayer, it would be those of limited intellect and natural skills, but this just isn't so.

We need to remind ourselves that effectual ministry does not depend upon natural abilities or natural resources, but rather on the movement of God's spirit. In **Zechariah 4:6** the prophet gives us these very important words spoken to him by the Lord, **"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord.**"

Zechariah was a prophet and priest. He had been raised up by God along with Haggai to animate the faltering zeal of the Jewish leaders and people who had returned from Babylonian captivity. One of those Jewish leaders that needed to be encouraged was a man named Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel had been appointed governor in post-exilic Jerusalem by Cyrus. Cyrus had hoped that Zerubbabel would return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Subsequently in approx. 530 BC some of the Jews under the leadership of Zerubbabel began work on the reconstruction of the temple. Unfortunately, through various setbacks, the work of reconstruction came to a complete stop. It was not until 520 BC that construction once again began to move forward on the temple project. What caused this project to once again move forward? It was largely through the moral and spiritual impetus of the prophets Zechariah and Haggai as God used them to stir up the people. Certainly, one of those that needed stirring was Zerubbabel. Though he was a man of great ability and personal skills, he had become totally frustrated. God therefore chose to remind him through the prophet Zechariah, that God's work is not accomplished in human energy but in the energy and power of God. We need to be reminded that it is not by our might or our power but by the Spirit of God that His work is accomplished.

Paul understood this. In **Col. 1:29** Paul said, **"And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."** Paul had no confidence in his own flesh. He knew that success was not dependent upon his work, but rather upon the work of God. This is why we see him praying repeatedly for his ministries and asking people such as the Thessalonians to pray for him and those ministries as well. What does he specifically ask the Thessalonians to pray for? He wants them to pray for two things.

First of all, he asks **"that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified."**

In other words, he wants them to pray for the success of the message. The phrase, "the word of the Lord" in the New Testament is most frequently associated with the gospel. This certainly was the case in **1 Thess. 1:8**, where the Apostle says, **"For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth."**

Paul, when he wrote this letter, was in Corinth. He is asking the Thessalonians to pray for the rapid spread of the gospel at Corinth. The Greek word for "spread rapidly" (TRECO) literally means "to run." The Thessalonians were to pray that the word of the Lord, the gospel of Jesus Christ, might run and spread rapidly where he is presently ministering.

Hopefully this would be your prayer for myself and the other elders here at Valley Bible Church; that from us the word of the Lord, the gospel of Jesus Christ might spread rapidly here in the Antelope Valley and then outward toward the whole world; that it might spread so fast that it would be as if it were running.

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And of course, if this happens then the word of the gospel of Christ will certainly be glorified. That is why Paul says, **“spread rapidly and be glorified.”**

Back in **Acts 13:44-49** we see this clearly, not only the resistance to the gospel but also what happens when people receive the gospel. Paul was preaching the gospel in a place called Pisidian Antioch, which was the chief city in the Roman province of Galatia, and would now be located in the country we know as Turkey. What do these verses tell us? **“And the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God. (45) But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. (46) And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. (47) For thus the Lord has commanded us, I have placed you as a light of the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the end of the earth.” (48) And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”** What happened in Galatia is what he wanted to happen now in Corinth where he was presently ministering. He wanted the Corinthians to believe the word of the Lord, to believe and accept the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to give the Lord thanks for His gracious gift of salvation. **“Just as it did also with you.”**

The second thing that he asks for is **“that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.”** Paul was always facing hostility, and he was facing hostility in Corinth. Again considering **Acts 18**, we learn that the initial resistance of the Jews in Corinth finally resulted in them bringing Paul before the judgment seat of Gallio for punishment. He certainly was in danger in Corinth. Those that threatened him with danger, Paul refers to as **“perverse and evil men”** in **V. 2**. The word perverse is very interesting. It literally means “out of place.” This is the only place in the New Testament that it is used of a person. It is always used of some object that has gotten lost. Here it means some person who is out of its proper place, someone who is morally insane. How can their condition be explained? It goes on to tell us, **“for not all have faith.”** These individuals in Corinth were not only rejecting the message, but they were also in the process of rejecting the messengers.

This is common in various parts of the world where opposing ideologies or religious faiths are firmly entrenched. Over fifteen years ago, I went to India and had the opportunity to visit the church in India. I heard testimonies from Indian evangelists who had been beaten and tortured for sharing their faith amongst the Hindus, particularly those in the northern part of the country. I heard of Indian Christians who had been martyred at the hands of Hindu extremists.

It is not so much a concern in our country that church leaders will be beaten, tortured and martyred, but still I would hope that you would be stimulated to pray for the leaders of Valley Bible. Not so much for our physical safety, which was the case for Paul and his companions, but for our spiritual safety so that we might continue to minister the Word of God faithfully in the power and might of the Spirit of God. This leads us to the second expectation that Paul and his companions had of the Thessalonians.

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HE EXPECTED THEM TO BE OBEDIENT

Paul is not only concerned that his ministry of the word would continue to be fruitful through their prayers in Corinth, but that their ministry would continue to be fruitful in Thessalonica through their obedience.

Let us read **VV. 3-4**, “**But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. (4) And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.**” Paul and his companions not only had the expectation that the Thessalonians would remain prayerful, but also obedient.

Why would he expect them to do this? Not because of Paul, not because of themselves, but because of the Lord. Paul reminds them that “**the Lord is faithful.**” God has promised us that He would complete the work that He had begun. And He will. We may at times feel so very weak, but the Lord will be faithful to “**strengthen**” us. There may be times that we feel so very vulnerable, but the Lord will “**protect us.**”

The particular person that Paul identifies as our adversary, the one we need to be strengthened and protected from, is called the “**Evil One.**” Whether we can see with our eyes the forces of darkness or not, it does not diminish the reality of our spiritual warfare.

Because the Lord is faithful, Paul is confident that the Thessalonians will continue to be obedient. Look at **V. 4**, “**And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.**” I have this same confidence. I have been preaching here in this church now for 24 years, and I can say the same thing as Paul. “**I have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.**” The commands obviously are referring to the teachings of the word of God.

When I get up in the pulpit and call you to pray for your leaders, you need to take this as a command because this is the word of God to your lives. When I get up in the pulpit and call you to be obedient to the teachings that you are hearing from the word of God, the traditions that have been passed down to us by the prophets and the apostles, this is a command.

I know that some of you come in here very casually from week to week, but I am confident in the Lord that if you are truly a child of God, you will obey. This leads to the third expectation.

HE EXPECTED THEM TO BE SPIRITUALLY GROWING

If you are praying for your leaders and if you are responding to their teachings as they expose for you the truths contained in Scriptures, then you will grow. Look at **V. 5**, “**And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.**” To direct means “to make straight,” or in other words, to remove all the obstacles and hindrances out of the way so that your “heart” or your inner man may go down a certain path. In this passage that passage leads “into the love of God” and “into the steadfastness of Christ.”

“Into the love of God.” When it refers to into the love of God what does it mean? Does it mean our love for God or His love for us? Probably both. For the simple reason they are tied together. The more we understand of His love for us, then we will be moved to love Him more.

“Into the steadfastness of Christ.” This can be either his patience with us or our patience in Him. Again it probably refers to both. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to learn more and more of the perseverance of Christ so that they themselves would become more persevering.

I want you to know more about God’s love so that you can love Him more. I want you to know about Christ’s endurance so that you can endure more. I want you to grow spiritually in your love and in your endurance. That is the point.

CONCLUSION

You have expectations of your leaders and your leaders have expectations of you. In this passage, it is clear what Paul wanted from the Thessalonians:

He wanted them to be prayerful.

He wanted them to be obedient.

He wanted them to be growing.

If these things are present in any particular fellowship, the leaders of that fellowship can only rejoice.