

2 Thessalonians 3

Verses 1-2:

--(1) **Finally, brethren.** . . shifts the focus of the letter to Paul's final purpose.

--**pray for us.** . . The tenses are *brethren, keep praying for us.* . . that being Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

--First, this request would remind the Thessalonians that Paul didn't see trials or persecutions as an excuse to stop serving God and others!

--Second, Paul was an example as he was never shy in asking for prayer (**Rom. 15:30-32; 2 Cor. 1:11; Phil. 1:19; Eph. 6:18-19; Col. 4:3; Philemon 22**). This request was reflective of his affection for them and the interdependence of their lives.

--**that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified.** . .

--Third, Paul was convinced that an effective ministry of the Word was tied to prayer.

--Paul wanted them to pray that the Word of God would spread rapidly and be honored. He was looking for more than victory in a single battle—he was asking for a sweeping campaign! What gave him such confidence?

--**just as it is with you.** . . Paul saw the miraculous spiritual work of the Spirit and the Word in them (**1 Thess. 1:5-7**)! He wanted them to pray that what God did for them would happen in other cities as well.

--(2) Prayer for deliverance is okay. Surrender to opposition is not.

--Clearly, some men cannot be reasoned with. We cannot believe in the "good faith" of all men.

Think of Jesus with Herod—He didn't speak a word!

Verses 3-4:

--(3) **But the Lord is faithful.** . . there is some wordplay here in the Greek. The faithless wicked are put in direct contrast with the Faithful One. We need to get our eyes off unfaithful men and onto our Faithful God.

--**who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.** He alone is able to solidify us inwardly and protect us outwardly. We should pray for this!

*Mt. 5:13: **And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.***

*Jn. 17:15: **I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.***

--(4) This statement leads into what follows. Paul is confident in the Lord's work in them to do what is right in His sight.

Verse 5:

--Here, we have Paul's prayer for them.

--**Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God.** . . We need God to love God!

--We are so feeble and wretched, that if God doesn't love us first or willingly allow Himself to be found of us—we would all be eternally lost to love, purpose, and perfection.

Bernard of Clairvaux (On Loving God) "Admit that God deserves to be loved very much, yea, boundlessly, because He loved us first, He infinite and we nothing, loved us, miserable sinners, with a love so great and so free. This is why I said at the beginning that the measure of our love to God is to love immeasurably. For since our love is toward God, who is infinite and immeasurable, how can we bound or limit the love we owe Him? Besides, our love is not a gift but a debt. . . My God and my help, I will love Thee for Thy great goodness; not so much as I might, surely, but as much as I can. I cannot love Thee as Thou deservest to be loved, for I cannot love Thee more than my own feebleness permits. I will love Thee more when Thou deemest me worthy to receive greater capacity for loving; yet never so perfectly as Thou hast deserved of me."

--The Greek word for **direct** has the idea of making straight what has gone crooked. God is removing the obstacles that hinder our hearts from experiencing His love and loving Him in return (**1 Chron. 29:18**).

--Jesus Christ knows where we are lost so He knows how to best direct us back to Himself.

Jn. 5:42: But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you.

Rev. 2:4: Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

--May He never say those things of us! May we always have the heart of Peter that could say in all sincerity: **Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You (Jn. 21:17).**

--**and into the patience of Christ.** . . similar to the above, the language is somewhat unclear in terms of the patience. It could be our patient waiting for Him, or His example of endurance for us. No doubt, the Holy Spirit inspired the language to be vague because both are true.

--Biblical patience is necessary as we expectantly look for Christ and follow His example.

Lk. 21:19: By your patience possess your souls.

Hebrews 10:36: For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

Verse 6:

--**But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** . . is the stern beginning to Paul's final issue with the church. This is a **command**, an order, not something up for debate.

--Not only that, but this is a command that would force them to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ as it is given in His name. What is this command?

--**that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.**

--Paul is commanding them in the name of Jesus to practice of church discipline.

--This was not some social exhortation. Paul is speaking to all the brethren, the entire congregation, in the name of Jesus Christ, to draw a definite line of demarcation.

--People do not like the idea of church discipline, but it is a clear command of Jesus and the apostles. *Robert Murray M'Cheyne said cases of church discipline almost drove him from the ministry! Until he saw God work in the souls of those who were so disciplined.*

--In fact, you would be surprised how many scholars and commentators don't want to acknowledge that Paul is calling for church discipline here! They try to claim that Paul is just encouraging some type of social ostracizing.

--There are numerous issues with that idea, but I will mention two here:

--The first and clearest issue is that there is no biblical command to socially reject any brother or sister in the body of Christ! The only biblical scenario any **brother** is ever on the outside of the fellowship is church discipline!

--The second issue is the hypocritical practicality of an unbiblical social rejection. It would be foolish for Paul to command believers to shun one another in public social settings but then gather around the Word of God, prayer, praise, baptism, and communion in unity. And if we say Paul would not allow them to participate in the activities of the fellowship—that is church discipline!

--I get why Christians do not like the idea or practice of church discipline. It feels “unchristian”. But that is why Paul is writing and why this section of scripture is very important for us today! The Holy Spirit knew we needed this.

--Paul commands in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ because He sent the standard.

Matthew 18:15-17: Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

--The practice of church discipline was carried on by the apostles (**1 Cor. 5**), the early church fathers, and is noted in many church confessions which recognize a true church by three marks: 1) The faithful ministry of the Word of God and gospel; 2) The faithful ministry of sacraments—baptism and communion; 3) The faithful ministry of church discipline.

--Who is Paul commanding them to withdraw from as a fellowship? **Every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.**

--First, it is important to see Christian brotherhood is never denied. Only professed Christians are put under church discipline.

1 Corinthians 5:12-13: For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”

--Brotherhood is not denied, but sin is acknowledged. The brother or sister under discipline is one that **walks disorderly**—**walks** is a regular habit of life and **disorderly** is out of rank. This is not any believer sinning and repenting, it is a Christian who is living in regular, unrepentant disobedience to the clear commands of Christ or the apostles—**the tradition he received from us**. *Church discipline is abused when people are put out of the fellowship for non-biblical reasons. The sin and Christ's command should be clearly defined and recognizable.*

Verses 7-10:

--What was the tradition they had received from Paul? He makes it clear!

--(7) Paul says we did not live a **disorderly** life in front of you. Paul clearly practiced what he preached.

--(8) Paul and his companions worked to provide for themselves and others. They didn't live off the graciousness of the Thessalonians.

--(9) Here Paul makes it clear he could have accepted material wealth for spiritual work. He wanted them to know that wasn't a sin because he didn't want his personal practice held against future ministers. Paul was so wise and balanced!

--Paul willingly surrendered his right to material support **to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us**. It would have been easier for Paul to accept support, but it was better for them if he showed them what a faithful Christian looked like in normal life!

--(10) By example and command the message was clear. Anyone who **will not work** (notice **will not** not **cannot**) was in clear disobedience to apostolic command and example.

--Not only that, Paul had admonished them in the last epistle!

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12: 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, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

Verses 11-12:

--(11) There is a wordplay here in the Greek, that goes something like this: *You are not busy, you are busybodies*. When we are not focused on our own business we end up in other people's business.

--The question here is: *Why?* We don't really know. Some think it was because of their excitement over the Lord's return. It could have been related to the persecution they faced. Some places in the world still struggle with a culture of laziness—there is little drive to work and provide for yourself if you can live off others, even if that life is meager.

--There was a heavy emphasis on caring for the poor in the early church. We see provision for widows was right in the beginning, the sale of personal property, Paul's collection for the saints in Jerusalem, **Gal. 2:10**, etc. No doubt this sentiment was being abused by some here in Thessalonica.

--(12) In giving this command Paul speaks directly to this disorderly element. Notice the distinction of: **there are some + those who are such.** . . in these two verses.

--This epistle would be read aloud to the orderly and disorderly. It no longer matters *why* they were disorderly. If they continued to be disobedient, it wasn't because of confusion but hardness of heart.

Verse 13:

--Here is a little encouragement to the obedient. It gets hard to keep doing good when it seems like it doesn't make a difference!

Galatians 6:9: *And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*

Verses 14-15:

--(14) Paul repeats the command to work, and the command to exercise church discipline with **anyone** who **does not obey our word in this epistle.**

--First, he says **note that person**—which just means to mark them out in some fashion. There is no explanation here as to how that worked practically. I believe Paul is saying it needs to be clear to the person they are under church discipline.

--Second, he says **do not keep company with him.** . . there is a single Greek word used for **keep company with** (*synanamignymi*), which is only used two other times in the NT and both of them are in **1 Cor. 5:9+11** where every scholar and commentator agrees Paul is also commanding church discipline. What he commanded earlier in **6** is not a different command than what he reaffirms here in **14-15.**

--The only reason the language in **1 Cor. 5** seems a little different is because they had ignored Paul's first commands to church discipline and were allowing a man in sexual sin with his step-mother to continue in church fellowship. Here, that is not the case. Paul is giving the Thessalonians the same thing he would give the Corinthians (**1 Cor. 5:9+11**).

--**that he may be ashamed.** . . is an interesting phrase that was used positively in terms of reverencing someone and negatively in terms of shameful rejection. It could be translated *to turn upon oneself.* . .

--The main goal of church discipline is redemptive. We want the brother or sister in persistent sin to turn upon themselves—to agree with God and the fellowship about their sin! And yes, any brother or sister in Christ, living in and enjoying the sin that Jesus had to die for should feel ashamed.

--If this feels harsh in our day and age, think of what it was like in Thessalonica! They were literally the only church in town!

--The separation of a sinful brother or sister from the fellowship is meant to be a visible picture of their spiritual reality with God.

--God commands separation to force the sinner to see their self-deception. They are no longer on good terms with God. Sin has created distance. *You cannot escape church discipline by going to another church—God is the instituter of the process!*

--Church discipline is the greatest level of church judgment possible in our current dispensation. Removal from the physical gathering of God's people should never be taken lightly. Those who are outside the Father's house are also outside of the blessings and protection within the Father's house.

1 Corinthians 5:5: deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

--Church discipline is necessary for the disobedient brother but also for the obedient fellowship. The Church cannot be a bunch of people fellowshiping around disobedience to Christ. Church becomes a mockery if we pick and choose which of Jesus' commands we are going to follow.

--Why would someone living in direct disobedience to the Word of God even pretend to attend and act like they want to hear the Word of God!? Only for selfish reasons. It's not about a relationship with Jesus anymore. It's just about religious games.

--Church discipline establishes the purity and sincerity of the local fellowship with Christ.

1 Corinthians 5:6: You glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

--How many churches have fallen apart because they have refused to respond biblically to bad behavior or bad doctrine?! **(Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10-11; 2 Jn. 9-11)**

--**(15)** What does that look like for our relationships outside of church? This!

--Anyone under church discipline is excluded from the fellowship of the saints around Christ and His Word. Paul explains the social boundaries, we are not called to withdraw from all interaction with the world. We only separate from unrepentant Christians in the church. ***1 Cor. 5:9-11***

--What should we do with the brother or sister under church discipline? Let them know they are not our enemy, but then **admonish him as a brother**. We are to warn and exhort them as they allow us to.

Proverbs 27:5-6: Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

--All Christians are called to speak the truth in love all the time. If the unrepentant brother or sister fights that, then there is no need to continue to cast pearls before swine. But if they are willing to listen, we should be willing to keep warning and exhorting as faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

--The leadership and the fellowship are commanded to admonish one another. Paul made that clear in first epistle—**1 Thess. 5:12+14**.

--If they come to their senses and repent before heaven and earth, they will be welcomed back like the prodigal son.

Verses 16-18:

--**(16) *Now may the Lord of peace Himself.*** . . this is the only time the Lord is so designated by Paul.

--God is always with us, but He is not always manifest. Knowing He is with us is what makes all the difference.

--**(17)** No doubt there was some intention here to calm their fears of a forgery.

--**(18)** Paul knew personally that the grace of God makes all the difference.

*Bruce (The 1st and 2nd Letters to the Thessalonians): *"It is the one word in Paul's vocabulary that embraces all that God has done, and that he desires that God will do, for his Thessalonian friends through Christ Jesus."**