

4. Wrapping up

July 12, 2007

Even though this letter from apostle Paul was short in length, I don't think that it is lacking in any punch or doctrine. As we now are about to finish this book, he is wrapping up a couple of things he can not afford for us to miss.

The first one is about praying for one another in v1-v5. The second one is about dealing with the people who are idle, but living off others in v6-v15. I believe that the Lord has a few great lessons in store for us here.

A. PRAY FOR US

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.

If I were Paul, I would have asked everyone I could to pray that I could get out of the difficult situation I've been facing. But to Paul, that was his main concern. He'd rather ask others to pray that the Word of the Lord would spread swiftly and the Lord be glorified. Then, he asked them to pray for their deliverance also.

There is always opposition to the Word and work of God. Paul asked his friends in Thessalonica to pray that he might be delivered from unbelieving men who were evil and wicked. Just as the Spirit uses dedicated people to share the Word, satan uses wicked people to oppose the Word.

However, Paul didn't rely on other people's prayers. Rather, he depended on the faithfulness of the Lord who establishes us and guards us from the evil. We cannot have confidence in ourselves, but we can have confidence in God for ourselves.

Too much Christian work these days is accomplished by human plans and promotion, not by the Word of God. The universe was created, and is sustained, by the Word of God. Surely His Word can accomplish His work in this world. But the preaching of the Word in the pulpit has too often been replaced by the entertainment of the world on the platform. It is their task to feed the sheep – not to entertain the goats.

Towards this end, Paul wisely prayed for both love and patience for the Thessalonian Christians. These two qualities are essential for the kind of spiritual stability and strength we need and they needed.

We have four great responsibilities to fulfill: believe the truth, guard the truth, practice the truth and share the truth. If we fulfill these duties, we will experience joy and power in our lives, and growth and blessing in our churches.

B. DON'T HANG WITH THEM

2 Thessalonians 3:6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

What germs are to the physical body, sin is to the spiritual body of Jesus Christ. Church problems are like physical problems. If left unsolved, they grow and become worse, and they infect more people. When Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonian church, he warned the idle busybodies to get to work.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 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, Apparently these troublemakers did not repent, because Paul devoted the rest of his second letter to this problem.

What was the problem? Some members of the assembly had misinterpreted Paul's teachings about the return of Christ, left their jobs, and were living off the generosity of the church. They were idle while others were working. Yet they expected the church to support them.

It is possible that this group of lazy saints was the source of the false teaching Paul mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:2. They were also spreading gossip about people in the church. They had time on their hands and gossip on their lips, but they defended themselves by arguing, "The Lord is coming soon!"

Misinterpretations and misapplications of the truths of God's Word can cause endless trouble. History records the foolishness of people who set dates of the rapture, sold their possessions, sat on rooftops and waiting for the Lord to return. Any teaching that encourages us to disobey another divine teaching is not Bible teaching.

The Lord purposely didn't set the rapture date, so that all generations can expect that their generation could be the one that is going to make the rapture, so they can be diligent in God's works and anticipate His return.

The Jews honored honest labor and required all their rabbis to have a trade. But the Greeks despised manual labor and left it to their slaves. This Greek influence, plus their wrong ideas about the doctrine of the Lord's return, led these believers into an unchristian way of life.

Paul recognized the fact that some people could not work, perhaps because of physical handicaps or family responsibilities. It was not a question of ability but willingness. When a believer cannot work and is in need, it is the privilege and duty of the church to help him.

The purpose in withdrawing from these disobedient ones was not so much punishment, but more so simply to deny these disobedient ones the aid and comfort of the fellowship of the body of Christ until they repented. It put them out of the church into the "domain" of satan, in hope that they might miss the fellowship of the church so much they would repent of their disobedience.

C. FOLLOW OUR EXAMPLES

2 Thessalonians 3:7-9 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, 9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

Paul was an excellent example among the Thessalonians, in that he worked hard to support his own needs. This wasn't because apostles like Paul didn't have the right to

request support. Instead, it was because he wanted to set a good example of hard work and prove false any accusation that he preached the Gospel for personal gain.

A pastor may appeal to the congregation with the authority of the Word. But if he cannot lead them with his own example of obedience, his people will not listen. The ministry leader must earn the respect from the people he or she leads instead of demanding it. As the leader obeys the Word and serves His people in the will of God, authority comes from position and people will give him or her respect.

D. NO WORK, NO FOOD

2 Thessalonians 3:10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

God, in most cases, provides our needs through our work. Again, Paul is not talking about those who CANNOT work, rather he is talking about WILL NOT work.

This brings an interesting topic we can argue with one another until it blows up in our faces: The beggars on the street corners. Do I help them or not? I don't help out those who ask for money. But I've given them food or water. If you have a job for them to do, offer them. If they refuse to work, you know their hearts. In other words, they should earn their living like the rest of us, not living off of us.

E. NO MORE BUSYBODIES

2 Thessalonians 3:11-12 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

These busybodies thought that if Jesus was coming soon, it made no sense to work. It would then be easy for them to intrude into the lives of others and take advantage of Christian generosity.

With authority, through our Lord Jesus, Paul commanded these busybodies to work, to get out of the business of others and to provide for their own needs instead of expecting other Christians to provide for them.

Few things are more wearying than seeing others, like some TV evangelists who are nothing more than con-artists, take advantage of Christian generosity. But we should never let the manipulations of some discourage us from doing good to the truly needy.

F. LET HIM BE ASHAMED, BUT NOT AS AN ENEMY

2 Thessalonians 3:13-15 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. 14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Sin in the life of a believer always affects the rest of the church. As members of His body, we belong to each other and we affect each other.

Suppose these saints did not obey God's Word and not working? What then should the church do? Paul had already taken the first step when he exhorted them in his first letter and warned them that they were wrong. But they had still persisted in their unruly behavior. He now warned them again in his second letter, and then added a further step: if these believers did not obey, the members of the church should personally discipline them.

G. VARIOUS CHURCH DISCIPLINES

What is church discipline? In many occasions, either they don't exercise church disciplines at all or they do it unbiblically.

We need to learn what the Bible says about church disciplines in various situations:

1) Personal differences between Christians – Matt. 18:15-18

If a brother or sister sins against me – either deliberately or unknowingly, I should go to that person privately and seek to get the matter settled. Only if the person refuses to settle the matter should I bring anyone else in. Then the problem must not go to the church family until every other means has been exhausted.

The big mistake Christians make when another believer wrongs them is in telling the pastor or other members, and not going to the person directly. Another mistake is in trying to win an argument instead of trying to win the sinning brother or sister.

2) Doctrinal error

Determine first of all why the person is teaching wrong doctrine. Perhaps it is because of ignorance and lack of Bible knowledge. In that case, patiently teach him the truth. If he persists, rebuke him with love. If the error continues, avoid him (Rom. 16:17-18), and then separate yourself from him (2 Tim. 2:18).

3) A believer overtaken by sin – Gal. 6:1-3

When a Christian is caught in known sin, the spiritual members of the church must seek to restore him with gentleness and love. The word 'restore' in Galatians 6:1 means "to set a broken bone" and that takes tenderness and patience. Too often the church quickly passes judgment on a believer who has sinned, and the damage done causes problems for years to come.

4) A repeating troublemaker – Titus 3:10

The troublemakers in the church want either the control of the church or recognition from others. They will do whatever it takes to get what they want including deception, gossip and manipulation. This leads to divisions and cliques in the local church. There is hardly a church that is not or was not affected by these troublemakers.

These "factious people" should be given two official warnings. If they repeat their sin of dividing the church, they should be given a third warning and rejected.

Titus 3:10-11 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

5) Open immorality – 1 Cor. 5

The church must mourn over the immoral sinner and seek to bring him to repentance. If he refuses, the church collectively should dismiss him. If he repents, he must be forgiven and restored to fellowship in the church.

Some of you may wonder, "If we expel them out of the church, who is going to minister to them, so that they may see the love of Christ. Who is going to bring them back?" Not you, not me. It would be the Holy Spirit. When they repent by a prompting of the Holy Spirit, they can take the first step back to the body of Christ with humility like the Prodigal Son did.

For obedient saints to treat disobedient Christians with the same friendship they show to other dedicated saints is to give approval to their sins.

However, Paul – knowing the tendency of human nature to go to extremes – cautioned them not to treat the offenders like enemies. It requires much patience, love, and grace to help a sinning brother.

H. BENEDICTION

2 Thessalonians 3:16-18 Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. 17 The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

As was his custom, Paul himself wrote the final words of the epistle with his own hand. This was both a personal demonstration of affection, and proof that the letter was authentic.

I. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Any teaching that encourages us to disobey another divine teaching is not Bible teaching.
- 2) We need to remember that sin in the life of a believer always affects the rest of the church. As members of His body, we belong to each other and we affect each other.
- 3) For obedient saints to treat disobedient Christians with the same friendship they show to other dedicated saints is to give approval to their sins.