

PRAYER AND THE LORD'S FAITHFULNESS

2 THESSALONIANS 03:01–05

Introduction

The main section of the letter of Second Thessalonians has been completed. This passage begins the final words ever written to the church by Paul so far as we know. In the final words, two subjects jump to the forefront immediately: prayer and the Lord's faithfulness.

- I. The request for prayer (vv. 1-2).
- II. The Lord's faithfulness to the believer (vv. 3-5).

I. 2 Thessalonians 03:01–02 Prayer

There was the request for prayer. The believers at Thessalonica were suffering severe persecution and all kinds of trouble. This was one of the reasons Paul was writing to the church: to comfort and encourage them to continue on for Christ. But remember: Paul was in Corinth and he too was suffering all kinds of trouble, including persecution. He needed the presence and power of the Lord as much as anyone. As John Walvoord says:

“Paul, too, was having his difficulties. The task committed to Paul was a very lonely one: to go from place to place, frequently coming into a strange city where not one person would welcome him. He was not entertained in the best hotel, nor was there any honorarium for him in recognition of his services. He had to find his own way, arrange for his public meetings, and somehow try to bear a testimony for Christ. Apart from fellowship with the Lord, it was a very difficult and solitary task and one in which there were many discouragements” (The Thessalonian Epistles, p. 146).

The specific trouble at Corinth was persecution. The Jewish religionists attacked Paul and dragged him before the civil authorities. However, the case was dismissed because it was a religious matter. Paul was allowed to continue his preaching mission, but apparently the Jewish religionists continued their opposition, stirring up whatever trouble they could (cp. Acts 18:1-18 for the full story).

The point is this: Paul needed prayer; he needed believers everywhere praying for him. But note what it was he requested. He did not ask prayer...

- for comfort
- for personal needs
- for God to take him away from Corinth and to open up a new ministry elsewhere

Paul's focus was not selfish, not upon himself — not at all. His whole focus was upon the spread and success of the gospel. He wanted prayer for two things.

1. There was the need for the Word to have *spread rapidly and be honoured*. The Word of God is often hindered, hampered and stymied. Too often, it has no power or influence among a people. Why?
-

- => opposition => unprepared hearts => sleepy eyed listeners
=> daydreaming minds => unprepared and carnal preachers and teachers

The list could go on and on, but the great need of the hour is for the Word of God to spread rapidly and be honoured in the pulpits and pews, classrooms and homes, streets and places of this nation and world.

“Spread rapidly” means to run. It is a picture of an Olympian athlete running in a race, the picture of the Word of God spreading all over because it is...

- focused • unflinching • active • vigorous
- strong • powerful • urgent

If the Word of God had spread rapidly, it would be honoured; that is, souls would be saved and lives changed. People would be freed...

- from sin and its enslavement • from guilty consciences
- from immoral and evil behaviour • from unjust treatment
- from ignorance • from worldliness

People would no longer experience emptiness, loneliness, purposelessness or lostness. They would be set free to know the Lord and to commit their lives to reaching and meeting the needs of a world full of desperate people. Note; this is exactly what had happened to the Thessalonian believers. The Word of God had spread rapidly among the Thessalonians; therefore, many had been converted to the Lord (cp. 1 Th. 1:5; 2:1, 13).

Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

1 Th 1:5 Because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

1 Th 2:13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

Psa 19:7-11 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Psa 147:15 He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.

Thought 1. Believers should always be praying for the ministers and teachers of the gospel — that the Word of God might have spread rapidly as it is preached and taught. And they should pray every day for every preacher and teacher they know. Think for a moment: What would happen if the believers of a single church prayed often every day for their minister and teachers? One thing is known: God could not sit still, for He would know that those believers were as sincere and genuine as they could be. He would know that they desperately wanted to reach their community for Christ.

2. There was the need for believers to be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men. Again, remember the situation of Paul, how he was being attacked in Corinth. He knew what it was like to be opposed by wicked people who would not listen to reason.

Ministers, teachers and believers alike are sometimes opposed and attacked by unreasonable and wicked people. Think how unreasonable the attacks are. Why would people want to oppose and attack a person who preaches and teaches...

- love
- discipline
- joy
- brotherhood
- peace
- salvation
- morality
- eternal life

Why would people want to attack a person who preaches and teaches that God loves the world — that He has provided the way for man to escape death and to live forever and that the *fountain of youth* has been revealed? A reasonable and honest person would never oppose or attack a person who was preaching and teaching this message. But note: not all people are reasonable and good. As Scripture says, all persons do not have faith (v. 2). In fact, the world is full of unreasonable and evil persons, persons who want to live like they want without any interference from God. They deny and ignore God — deny and ignore the evidence within the world and within their hearts and thoughts that God exists and that His love and judgments are real. Therefore, they oppose anything that reminds them of eternity, of a coming day of judgment. They want nothing to do with a message that puts restrictions upon their behaviour, especially a message that demands so much love — a love that demands that we give all we are and have to meet the needs of the dying and poor masses of the world.

Believers, ministers and laymen alike, need to be delivered from such unreasonable and evil persons. When people lack reason and morality, goodness and honesty, conscience and decency, they are dangerous. They can hinder both the messenger and the message of the gospel. Therefore, believers need to be constantly praying for God to deliver His people from unreasonable and evil persons.

Rom 15:30-31 *I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there.*

Eph 6:18-20 *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

1 Th 5:25 *Brothers, pray for us.*

2 Pet 2:9 *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

II. 2 Thessalonians 03:03–05 Faithfulness of Jesus Christ

There is the faithfulness of the Lord to the believer. The Lord Jesus Christ is faithful. Believers may fail us: when we stand in the greatest need, when people oppose and persecute us, when the most terrible trials confront us — believers may fail...

- to pray
- to encourage
- to support
- to speak kindly
- to help

But not the Lord. The Lord God is faithful. He will do four things for the believer.

1. The Lord will strengthen the believer and keep him from evil.

=> The word “strengthen” (sterixei) means to establish, secure, make stable or firm and set fast.

=> The word “protect” (phulaxei) means to guard, keep.

=> The word “evil” can refer both to evil behaviour and to the evil one, that is, Satan.

The point is this: the Lord is faithful, even if we fail to help one another. God will strengthen and guard us against Satan and his evil followers. In fact, the Lord will strengthen and guard us against all evil no matter what it is. Even if the evil seems to be conquering us, it will not — not in the final analysis.

=> God will deliver us by working all things out for good.

Rom 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

=> God will deliver us by overcoming our failures and completing His work of salvation in us.

Phil 1:6 *Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

2 Tim 1:12 *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

Jude 1:24-25 *To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy — to the only God our Saviour*

be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

⇒ God will deliver us by delivering us from death.

2 Tim 4:18 *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever.*

2. The Lord will motivate the believer to keep His commandments. The Lord actually works within and energizes the believer to will and do God's pleasure, that is, to keep His commandments. When we *sense a stirring*, some energy being aroused within our hearts to do good, that is the Spirit of God working within us. The Lord will never leave the believer, not completely; so long as the believer is on earth, the Lord will continue to work within him, to stir and energize him to keep God's commandments. This is the reason Paul had confidence in the Thessalonian believers, that they would keep the commandments of the Word that had been taught them.

Thought 1. This is a critical fact; a person can tell if he is a true believer or not by the working of the Lord within his heart. If a person keeps the commandments of God, then it is evidence that the Lord is working within his heart; however, if a person is not keeping the commandments of God, then it is evidence that the Lord does not live within his heart and is not working within him.

1 John 2:3 *We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.*

1 John 3:18-19 *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence.*

1 John 4:13 *We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*

1 John 5:10 *Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.*

3. The Lord directs the believer's heart into the love of God. This means both God's love for us and our love for God. The word "direct" (*kateuthunai*) means to make straight or to be straight. It means to remove obstacles out of the way or to open up. The Lord Jesus Christ takes the genuine believer and opens up his heart; He straightens, directs and focuses the believer's heart upon the love of God. The result is that the believer learns to love God more and more. His attention and focus becomes more and more set upon God's love. Therefore, when trials, trouble, temptation and evil attack the believer, he is able to stand in the love of God and overcome the attack.

John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Jude 1:21 *Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*

Deu 6:5 *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

Deu 10:12 *And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

Psa 31:23 *Love the Lord, all his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full.*

4. The Lord also directs the believer to endure just as Christ persevered. To endure in what? In patiently waiting for Christ's return. The Lord Jesus Christ stirs the genuine believer to keep his eyes upon His return. Therefore, when evil strikes, the believer endures and perseveres — stands in strength and patience — keeping his eyes and heart focused upon the glorious hope of Christ, the hope of conquering death and of living forever and ever in perfection with God, the hope of ruling and reigning throughout the whole universe for Christ.

Col 1:5 *The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel.*

1 Th 5:23 *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Tim 6:14 *To keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Titus 2:12-13 *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

1 Pet 1:3 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

1 John 2:28 *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. ■*