



MONDAY NIGHT BIBLE STUDY

DECEMBER 27, 2021

The Power of Prayer and Unity **2 Thessalonians Chapter 3** **Erik Luchetta**

The Apostle Paul longed for the gospel to be able to run quickly everywhere he preached. That's what God's word is meant to do – it's meant to run throughout the world setting people free with the love and victory of God. Paul was happy to see this happening in the church of Thessalonica. But Paul saw in many other places that the word wasn't moving so freely. In fact, just before Paul wrote this letter, he ran into difficulty. We can see the struggles he was experiencing in the book of Acts chapter 17. The people in Acts 17 were mostly resistant or disinterested in the gospel. But Paul knew something that would change that. He knew there was a way for the gospel to gain speed and where he wouldn't be as hindered.

The answer is surprisingly simple: Prayer. Paul trusted that God would be faithful if these Christians prayed. Paul asked them to pray that the same way the gospel is moving in their lives and community, that it would do so everywhere Paul preached. In addition, Paul was sometimes hindered through the threats and physical persecution he experienced for preaching the gospel. So he also asked for their prayers that he would be "delivered from wicked and evil people (v.2)."

These new Christians must of thought, "Us pray for Paul? Yet Paul knew the power of prayer even in new believers. And these Christians had to learn the lesson that they are not too small, too young in the faith, too insignificant to pray for someone as well known as the apostle Paul. They had to learn that prayers are powerful and effective even in new believers.

In verse 3 Paul writes, "But God is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one." First Paul says that "God is faithful." In other words, Paul is saying that he is confident that if they pray for him, God will answer their prayer. But Paul also says in that verse, "and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one." What does this mean in the context of this verse? Here's what Paul is saying, "As you pray for my strength and protection from evil people who are trying to harm me, God will make sure that it returns to you in the same manner. You'll be protected from the evil one when he comes against you." In other words, Paul is telling them that their prayers for him are seeds being sown where they will reap a harvest of the same thing. Paul is showing us that when we pray for others, God will do more than we think. He'll answer our prayer, and then do for us what we asked him to do for others.

Now, for as much Paul is happy with how they are doing with the word of God running unhindered through their lives, he has one concern. There's one thing they need to do. Imagine dancers



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moving across the floor in perfect formation. If it's a ballet, every toe and heel and arm must be in the proper place at the right time. If it's going to be a beautiful, if it's going to be all that it was intended to be, each person will have to do their part according to what is expected. However, three times in this passage, Paul uses a word that could have been applied to a dancer who lost concentration, or a dancer who decided to do dance differently. That's what Paul means when he says, "idle". It basically means to "step out of line". In other words, the beauty of the dance is being hindered. As a result, the beautiful picture of the family of God, working together in love and mutual support, was being somewhat hindered.

Paul wants to help them do better. So what specifically were some of them doing that was out of line? The answer is found again in the world idle. Some believers in this church didn't work to support themselves or their families. Or at least, they didn't work hard enough to support themselves. As a result, they lived off the generosity of others in the church. Paul saw that Christians were taking advantage of other Christians. These people were "out of line" with what Paul taught them when he was with them. Now it's not clear why they weren't working. Some speculate that they believed Jesus could return at any moment, then why bother working. The point Paul is making is that they shouldn't look to others to supply all their needs if they are able to work themselves. Of course, the scriptures are clear that when someone is struggling, we need to step up and help them.

What Paul is saying even goes beyond him saying that they should work for their food. Again, if we read it slowly, we can see. Verses 7-9 - "follow our example...not because we do not have the right to such help...in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate." Where is Paul going with this? He is teaching a principle here.

1 Corinthians 9:14-15 - Paul had a right to be supported by the church in Corinth and by the church in Thessalonica. But he didn't take their support. He laid down his rights, he made himself uncomfortable, in order to go the extra mile in helping them grow. The point Paul is making is that those who weren't working because they didn't want to, have no right to help. However, the principle Paul is teaching goes beyond that. He's saying even if you do have certain rights, sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes it's good to lay down those rights if it could help another person. In other words, he's telling those people who aren't working to not only get to work, but also going forward find ways to help the community, to help others even if that sometimes means laying down your rights. He's saying go the extra mile. That was "the example" that they were to "imitate."



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It's asking a lot and Paul knows it. It's almost never fun to lay down your rights to something. But again, we don't always lay down our rights, but in every situation we should consider if it's appropriate.

Verses 14-15 - Why such harsh response? He says take note of those who refuse this instruction and don't associate with them. Paul is taking this very seriously. Granted he says we are not to consider them an enemy. They are still our brothers and sisters. But Paul looks at the church as a performance. There's a lot on the line. People's faith could be harmed, feelings could be hurt, perhaps even that church could end up dissolving if people aren't committed to the sort of life that God expects. The church can put on a beautiful performance, but it's also a risky performance especially if people decide to do whatever they want and not look out for the needs and feelings of others. As a result of this high risk, Paul tells them not to associate with certain people if they refuse Paul's instruction. Certainly, they are to bring them back in love when they have a change of heart.

As is common, Paul ends his letter by praying that God would give them peace in all situations. Not only a personal sense of peace, but a peace within the community. As peace reigns in that community, the world sees the beautiful performance of love and unity that the church displays for the whole world to look at and marvel.