

An Exegesis of II Thessalonians 3:1-15

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Just to refresh our memories a bit and to get us into the right frame of mind, it might be a good idea to review some of the isagogics of II Thessalonians.

According to most of the commentators, this letter was written only a few months after Paul's first letter to the church in Thessalonica. In the first letter Paul had answered some questions regarding the last day and what would happen to those who had already died. Apparently what Paul wrote in the first letter did not take care of the problem and so he felt compelled to write more. It seems that some in the congregation felt that Christ's return was sure to come any moment and so they gave up their jobs and were not working. We have already heard how Paul answers this by pointing out that the "Man of Lawlessness" must be revealed before the end comes. In chapter three he advises the Thessalonians as to how they should deal with those who will not listen to what he has to say and still refuse to work.

Paul begins this section by making requests for prayers:

1) Finally, Brothers, include us in your prayers. Pray that the word of the Lord might spread rapidly and be given glory just as it has among you.

proseuchesthe: pres mid. impv. Always indicates requests made of God.

peri hemon: Can mean for us, for our benefit. **peri** has the idea of encircle, therefore, include us in the circle.

doxazetai: pres. pass. subj. to make renown. Cf. Jn 8:54, 11:4

Paul here is requesting the mission prayers of his fellow Christians. He urges them to remember how God's word was brought to them and how happy they were that they had come to know their Savior through it. It is this fact that will urge them to pray that the word would come to others also, that it would spread quickly and be glorified.

This is really a restatement of the first and second petitions. God's Name is hallowed and his kingdom comes whenever the word of God is spread. His word needs to be spread quickly too, for the time is coming when it will be very difficult to spread the word.

The word is glorified when people are brought to faith through it and so hold it in high esteem and turn to it in every need.

The fact that Paul requests the prayers of his people is an example for us. Certainly we are not so proud as to think that we can run our congregations on our own. We know that it is God alone who can help us and keep us from making a mess of things, as Luther so aptly reminds us in his sacristy prayer. We do a lot of, praying. We often ask our people to join us in praying for missionaries etc. But what about asking them to pray for us? We need our people's prayers just as much as the missionaries in Africa or wherever. We need their prayers that we would be ever more effective tools in spreading the Lord's word so that it may be glorified.

2) Pray also that we might be .delivered from improper and evil men, (for not all have the faith).

atopos: out of place, improper, wicked.

ou. . . pistis: a litotes

The second thing that Paul asks his people to pray for is that God would rescue, or deliver, him from those who mean him harm. This was certainly necessary. Already in Damascus, just after his conversion, people were trying to get rid of Paul. In Thessalonica some of the Jews had stirred up so much trouble that Paul had to leave. He was in almost constant danger of losing his life. The reason he gives for this is that "not all have the faith." Those who neither have the gospel nor have received it by faith will certainly be opposed to it and those who try to spread it. The number of such people is by no means small. True Christians are in the minority, not only then, but now also.

This is a prayer that all Christians need, but Paul especially felt the need for this prayer because he was so visible. He was the leader, the one on the front lines, and therefore, he was the one the enemies of the gospel were most likely to pick on.

We can be thankful that we don't have to face the same situation as Paul. How many of us would be able to stand up to a stoning or a death sentence! The devil doesn't threaten us with a firing squad or the electric chair to make us lose our faith, but he may try to lure us away with riches, or he may try to influence us through false teachers. May the Lord deliver us also from improper and wicked men.

3) But the Lord is faithful. He will strengthen you and guard you from evil.

kyrios: The LORD, the covenant God

There is some discussion in this verse over the phrase **apo tou ponerou**. The question is whether it should be masculine or neuter, "from the evil one" (NIV and others), or "from the evil thing", evil in general (KJV). It is impossible to decide from the form and the context doesn't help all that much either. If it was plural we would assume that Paul was referring back to the evil men of verse 2, but it is singular.

I chose to go with the more general, "from evil," because I felt that the burden of proof lay with those who want to make it more specific (i.e., the evil one.). Paul doesn't seem to be talking about the Devil here. Also, this is the same phrase that Jesus used in the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:13). It should be noted, however, the NIV is consistent and translates "from the evil one" there also. But again, it seems to me that the more general "from evil," is a more acceptable translation.

In this verse we have a very abrupt change of objects. Up until now, Paul had been requesting his people to pray for him. Now he includes himself with them and says: "The Lord will guard and strengthen you." It may be that Paul felt that he had given the Thessalonians cause for alarm in asking them to pray that he be rescued from evil men. If he, the great apostle Paul was concerned about evil men, what about them? Shouldn't they worry?

No, Paul says, the Lord is faithful. He is completely trust worthy. He always keeps his promises. Jesus proves that. And one of his gracious promises is that whatever evil he does not keep away from us he will turn into our good. In fact the very thing that we consider to be evil may be the thing he is using to strengthen us. We pray deliver us from evil. Our faithful God has promised to do just that. Now trust him.

4) Now we trust you in the Lord, that you are doing and will do what we command.

pepoithamen: 2 perf. indic. act.; to be persuaded, to cause to believe
parangellomen: pres. indic. to transmit a message, order, command

Certainly the Thessalonians had been and would continue to include Paul in their prayers. Paul knew that before he asked it, and he now acknowledges that fact. But just because your wife knows you love her doesn't mean that she doesn't want to hear it again and again. And so Paul requests their prayers again and again because they are important to him.

Paul probably has in mind here much more than just the prayers he requested. Placing this phrase at the end of his second letter indicates that he is thinking of everything. That they are and will carry out everything he has and will ask them in the Lord.

Certainly it should be said of us that we are doing and will gladly do what the Lord has commanded us to do.

5) May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and the patience of Christ.

kateuchunai: 3 sing aor opt. Make straight, guide direct.

This verse presents the old problem of the subjective/objective genitive. Is it Paul's wish that the Lord guide the Thessalonians (and us) into the love which God has and wants to give and the patience which Christ has and wants to give; or into love for God and patient waiting for Christ.

Taking into consideration what follows, the former would be what the Thessalonians need. In dealing with "disorderly" brothers, they would need to be constantly reminded of the love God has shown all people and the seemingly unending patience of Christ which could say: "Father they forgive them for they know not what they do," and asked us to forgive one another 70 x 7. And certainly it is the love of God and the patience of Christ that is our motivation, our reason for doing what he commands.

As is often the case, the objective genitive cannot be totally out of the picture. It is the love of God and the patience of Christ that make us want to love him in return and patiently wait for his glorious second appearing. May God grant Paul's wish for the Thessalonians to us also.

6) Now, Brothers, we charge you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to set yourselves apart from every brother who is living in a disorderly manner and is not living in accord with the tradition which they received from us.

parelabosan: 3 pl. aor; take to oneself, receive, accept. the variants are split basically between 3 person and 2nd person. The argument is that 3rd person is harder to explain.

stellesthai: to set in order

paradosin: the act of giving over, tradition; cf. I Cor 11:2 ordinance; 2 Thess 2 :15; Mt 15:2,3,6; Gal 1:14; Col 2:8 (of Pharisees)

This is Paul's introductory statement for what follows. He is going to remind the Thessalonians how to deal with someone who is living in a disorderly way. The disorder is qualified by the statement, "Not in accord with the tradition they received from us." That is, not

disorderly just because someone is different or you don't like him, but disorderly because he is out of line with what God has said.

It is important to notice that Paul says that we are to set ourselves apart from, remove ourselves from such a person. After he gives an example of the kind of disorderliness he means in this case, he will have more to say about this separation.

Notice also that he says every brother. First of all we are to deal in this way with fellow believers, brothers. Secondly, there are to be no exceptions. Every brother who is disorderly is to be treated in this way.

7-10) For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not disorderly among you, nor did we eat meals (bread) with anyone without paying for them; but with labor and hardship we worked day and night so as not to burden any of you. It's not that we didn't have the right to do this, but we wanted to give you an example to follow. For even when we were with you we charged you, "If someone doesn't want to work, don't let him eat either."

Here Paul makes clear what kind of disorder and which command he was talking about. From the scanty evidence that can be gathered by more or less reading between the lines, it is generally believed that some Thessalonians had overreacted to the doctrine of Christ's second coming, as some still do today. They were so sure that the Lord would return soon that they stopped working, quit their jobs, closed up their shops etc. To show that this is wrong Paul uses himself as an example.

When Paul was in Thessalonica he worked hard. He didn't even accept a free meal from anyone. He didn't want to give anyone the impression that he was just another wandering philosopher with a new idea for sale. The gospel is free and he didn't want to obscure that fact in any way. He most likely supported his own ministry by making tents on the side. As for the matter of Paul's right to receive support from the congregation, see I Cor 9:1-18.

The point of the illustration is really this. Some were justifying their lack of work by pointing to what Paul had told them about the second coming. But if that were a correct interpretation of Paul's teaching on the second coming, why was Paul working day and night in toil and hardship? Why wasn't he sitting and waiting? The point is clear. "If someone doesn't want to work," if he just wants to sit around and wait for Christ's return, "Don't let him eat either."

The application of these verses for our people is twofold. First, it can serve as a warning and instruction for them when they hear of people today who pick a day for the Lord's return, quit their jobs and sit around waiting. God clearly says that this is not what he wants. Second, for whatever the reason, a person who is able to work, but refuses, should not be allowed to sponge off of his fellow believers. We should separated ourselves from him so as not to encourage him. He has become a candidate for church discipline.

Applying these verses to ourselves and our ministry shows us that we need to set an example for people to imitate. They need to catch from us the joy of forgiveness and the desire to work for the Lord. If vie as Pastors don't show this joy and desire, we can't expect our people to show it either. The "Jesus loves you, you should be happy, NOW BE HAPPY" just doesn't quite make it.

The other thing is work. We, as Pastors, are always busy, but I think we have to admit that we are not always working. It has been said that it is very easy to loaf in the ministry, and it's true. We need to constantly remind ourselves of that fact and be a guard against it.

11-13) For we hear that some among you are living in a disorderly manner, not working but being busybodies. In regard to such as these we charge and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ, that, working in quietness, they eat their own bread. But you, Brothers, don't become weary in doing good.

periergazomenos: busy oneself about nothing, be a busybody.

Those who had quit working apparently didn't stop there. They were using their idle time making trouble among the other believers. Having nothing else to do they began to meddle in other people's business. We might imagine such a person sitting next to a brother's fruit stand in the market, eating his fruit and telling him how to run his business, or how he too should stop working. Idleness is the Devil's workshop. Paul's stern command is that such people should get back to work, stop sponging meals off of their fellow Christians, and mind their own business. As for the others, and for us, don't become tired of doing good. Certainly when we live in the word daily, we will be daily refreshed and will never tire of doing good.

14-15) But if someone does not accept the things we say in this letter, mark that person. Do not keep company with him, in order that he might be ashamed. And yet, do not consider him an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

semeiousthe: mark, not, (Ro 16 = **skopeo**)

synamignysthaoi: to mix up, keep company with. Cf. I Cor 5:9,11.

Paul now returns to the point with which he began in verse 6. The Thessalonians are to place themselves apart, separate themselves from anyone who acts in a manner not in keeping with the Apostles' teaching. Paul is not referring only to a refusal to work, but to everything he has written in this letter. And also by inference, he is referring to anything else he has written. He is writing as an Apostle. His authority is from God. He is writing by inspiration and therefore those who disobey him disobey God.

A person who refuses to listen to what the Bible says is to be marked. He is to be noted. This seems to mean some form of public notation before the congregation. This would have to be done of course, according to Mt 18. If the disagreement were that one of the members of the church in Thessalonica did not go back to work after this letter from Paul was read to him, there would be no difficulty in seeing that this person was in disagreement with Paul and so he would be marked by his own action or lack of it.

In addition to this, the Thessalonians were not to keep company with such a person so that his conscience would be roused and he would realize that what he was doing was serious, a violation of God's law. The attitude toward such a person should not be "you dummy, how could you do such a thing;" but, "please stop doing it, we love you in the Lord."

Certainly we know that this is still the way that we are to deal with erring brothers. But, are we doing it? I have the feeling that there is very little true church discipline going on in our churches. Our people seem almost to have the idea that church discipline is legalism, and it can

be. Or they think that you shouldn't carry it out just because someone isn't coming to church or communion; it has to be something serious like adultery or murder. But what about refusing to work? Our people won't carry out proper church discipline on their own, we have to lead and instruct them. It certainly isn't a fun. job, but it is one that is necessary and beneficial to the church.

Possible Preaching texts:

verse 1: Mission text

verses 1-5 & esp. 3 Trust in God

verses 6-15: Church discipline, Labor day, End times.

Main ideas to apply to ourselves:

We can't do it alone, we need the prayers of our people, God's help. We also need to remember that as Pastors we are examples to the flock. We ought to give them an example of hard working dedication to the Lord. And finally, we will have to lead and instruct our people in carrying out proper church discipline.