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God, through His Son Jesus, provides eternal grace for our failures and human limitations.

2 Thessalonians 3.

(2013)

The Bible not only reveals God's eternal plans purposes and promises

But also shows how you can know God for yourself.

Teach it, don't demand it.

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2 Thessalonians 3.

Topics.

- The Lord will guard you against the evil one.
- The relationship between the believer and the Lord.
- If anyone is not willing to work, let them not eat.
- Do not grow weary in doing-good.
- Do not regard those who disobey as an enemy, but warn them as a brother.

The Previous Chapter: in the previous chapter Paul told the Thessalonians not to think that the day of the Lord Jesus Christ had come, he spoke of a great apostasy, of a man of sin and of the mystery of lawlessness that is already at work being revealed. He talked of a man who is restraining until he is taken out of the way and of God sending a strong delusion.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray for him and those with him

2 Thess. 3:1-2 ----- ¹Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honoured, as happened among you, ²and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

It is interesting to notice that the underlying theme of Paul's prayers is always about asking God to help him to help others. Here Paul is asking the Thessalonians to pray that God will deliver him and those ministering with him from evil men, but only so that they can continue to proclaim the Gospel so that others would be saved to eternal life. Paul's prayer request, "Pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men" (v2) most likely refers to the Jews who held fast to Moses Law and Jewish religious customs and traditions and therefore aggressively opposed the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and violently persecuted Paul and those who ministered with him.

The Lord will Guard you against the Evil One.

2 Thess. 3:3-5 ----- ³But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. ⁴And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. ⁵May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

The "evil one" (v3) can refer to any person who denies the Lord Jesus Christ and opposes those who proclaim the Gospel. In this context it could refer to the following three groups of people: -

1. The Jews who were persecuting the Thessalonian brothers and sisters.
2. To the leaders of the pagan faiths that the Gentiles had forsaken to embrace the Christian faith.
3. To the Romans who imprisoned and afflicted those who proclaimed Christ as their King.

Biblical writers rather than go into lengthy detail to explain all the various groups or individuals who were involved in withstanding God the Lord and those who proclaimed the Gospel simply used the term, "the evil one." It is an expression that

embraces in its meaning all who aggressively oppose Christ and the Christian faith and persecute those who follow the Lord. Paul tells the Thessalonians that "The Lord will establish them and guard them against the evil one" (v3) yet the Lord is in heaven so how can he protect the Thessalonian brothers and sisters on earth. The answer is simple when it is understood that Paul did not have in mind that Christ would protect them from suffering and persecution, but that he would by his Spirit establish the Thessalonians and guard them from forsaking their faith.

Paul seeing the Thessalonians endurance and faithfulness in the face of extreme persecution is confident the Thessalonians will do the things he has said and for this reason he is able to say without doubt that the Lord by his Spirit will keep them.

The relationship between the believer and the Lord: living with Christ is a two-way relationship as is any relationship of love. Those who belong to the family of the Lord live from the heart to honour God and the name of Christ and God responds to their love and faithfulness by comforting their heart with His love and fills their inner most being with joy, contentment and peace.

It is a spiritual relationship with the brother or sister in Christ working upward toward God and God reaching down to them it is their spirit uniting with God's Spirit and their heart uniting with God's heart. No-one can destroy this spiritual relationship since neither God nor the Lord will ever withdraw their love therefore the only person who can destroy it is the brother or sister themselves and even then they would have to consciously deny God and wilfully reject Christ.

To support this statement we only have to read the humbling and breathtaking words Paul wrote to the Roman brothers and sisters: -

- Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).

Clearly showing the only person who can rob us from the love of God in Christ is ourselves. Paul also prays that: -

- The Lord would direct the hearts of the Thessalonians to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ (v5).

Some today would say that to pray in this manner serves no purpose because it is our choice to focus our hearts to the love of God yet despite this Paul did pray that the Lord would direct the Thessalonians hearts to the love of God. This is because the Christian life is not simply about having intellectual knowledge, but being united by faith in a spiritual relationship to Christ and in any relationship two people are always involved. The Christian faith is no different it is always two and like any human relationship of love when one person moves toward the other, the other person comes closer to them. Likewise when a brother or sister moves toward the Lord he by the Spirit moves toward them, thus when a faithful child of God prays and yearns from the heart to know the love of God in Christ the Lord will answer that prayer.

NOTICE: Paul's prayer is about the heart and love not Scriptural knowledge for that we are told to, "Study to show ourselves approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). If we do not listen to faithful teachers or read the Bible ourselves any prayer for Scriptural knowledge is in vain. God rewards those who seek after him so whoever reads the Bible with a heart that desires to know the Lord and in prayer asks God to enlighten his word to their minds will be rewarded.

A personal note: from my experience reading the Bible is like walking through a desert, there are times of much dryness, but I have learned as I continue to read suddenly an oasis appears and my heart jumps a beat as I am engulfed in the wonder and presence of the Lord. Never stop because of the dry ground God will

reward you with breathtaking-moments along the way and as the years pass by you will discover that you have grown spiritually without even realising it.

Twelve tips to help when reading the Bible: -

1. Know that the Lord by his Spirit is with you as you seek after him so talk and pray to him as you read.
2. Don't trust what you have been taught, prove it for yourself.
3. Don't fear getting things wrong, it's Christ who saves us not head knowledge (when in doubt you can always ask someone you trust later).
4. Meditate on what you don't understand, but don't fret or be anxious about it, know that as you continue to read the verses you don't understand will slowly unfold.
5. Keep in mind God delights in those who seek after him (whether they clearly understand everything they read or not).
6. Know that salvation is in Christ not in detailed knowledge so never be afraid to explore and test what others are teaching.
7. If born into a religious organisation mentally question what you believe until you have made it your own.
8. Treat your time in the Bible as a spiritual journey and adventure of discovery.
9. Pretend you know nothing and allow Scripture to reveal itself to you.
10. Read the verses in context and then apply the principal to yourself.
11. Take time to read it devotionally, be consciously aware that God is with you meditate on the Lord, allow it to transcend your mind to heavenly places, it does not always have to be about learning.
12. Compare what has been taught against the lives of Jesus and the apostles (i.e., if a teacher is proclaiming that God's children should prosper, be successful and wealthy because they belong to God the King look at the lives of Jesus and the apostles and test this (and any other) teaching against how they lived).

Sometimes to bring encouragement or comfort (especially in moments of extreme crisis and sorrow) God may highlight a Scripture to the readers mind these are very individual and personal moments that only apply to the readers life, faith and their particular circumstance so they should be treasured as God's intimate gift to the reader only and not taught as a general principal that applies to everyone.

If Anyone is Not Willing to Work, let them Not Eat.

2 Thess. 3:6-10 ----- ⁶Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labour we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

The meaning of the following words from Strong's Concordance: -

Idleness: (disorderly in KJV) means irregularly or morally disorderly and by implication insubordinate or religiously unruly.

Tradition: means a precept especially the Law of Moses and Jewish religious traditions.

Paul not only tells us, "To stay away from any brother who is lazy (v6) he actually commands us to stay away. Added to this he gives us another command not even to give them food (v10). Showing that God does not expect brothers and sisters in Christ to burden their own families by giving financial aid or food to a brother who is lazy and for no good reason is unwilling to work. Upon saying this it should be mentioned that this command does not apply to a person who is out of work, but is willing to work, laziness is about attitude and choosing not to work when someone is fully able to work. God does not expect anyone to help a person who is unwilling to help themselves.

This is because the bank account of most churches and the savings of most brothers and sisters is very limited so when a church or individual gives one hundred dollars to a person who is clearly choosing to be lazy that is one hundred dollars the church or the individual brother or sister don't have to give to a faithful brother or sister who is struggling or a family who is suffering hardship because of a crisis beyond their control. Obviously this principal does not apply to a person who for whatever reason is going through a period of depression or some other crisis in their life and simply does not want to work, that person is in desperate need of encouragement, comfort and compassion.

For me the person Paul has in mind when he made the statement "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (v10) is the person who consciously and purposely chooses to sponge off others (they do exist). Paul would rather see this money going to the honest and faithful that are in a crisis that is beyond their control since most church bank accounts and the spare money of most brothers and sisters in Christ is very limited and therefore when most give from the generosity and kindness of their hearts they are in many cases putting themselves in financial difficulty.

Thus the idea behind what Paul is saying (I think) is that no brother or sister should put their own family under a financial burden for others who for no good reason chose not to work. It's about being a good steward with our money since it is limited, and making sure it goes to those who are deserving since by giving it to those who chose not to work we are robbing it from the faithful who are willing to work, but for whatever reason are suffering because of some crisis beyond their control.

The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labour (Prov. 21:25).

Not in accord with the tradition that you received from us: (v6) the word traditions in the scriptural sense means things delivered over from one to another either written or oral it carries the idea of delivering or handing over a message received from someone else.

The apostle Paul spoke in the previous chapter of, "Traditions that were taught and spoken either by their spoken word or written in their letters (1 Thess. 2:15) clearly showing that when the apostles use the word traditions it refers to doctrines and precepts they had taught and not traditions that had come down from ancient times or any Jewish religious traditions of the church since there is no evidence that any of these types of religious traditions were given by the apostles.

Paul only speaks of what had been delivered by himself and the apostles, whether orally or by letter, thus the word traditions refers to anything delivered in the way of teaching by the apostles whether in their preaching, private conversation, or by their letters.

The traditions that Paul and the apostles taught refer to doctrines and rules such as respecting the good order and the government of the church, the Lord's supper; water baptism, proper conduct of the women and godly behaviour, not being lazy, but working to support ourselves when able, helping the poor, showing honour to those who faithfully labour for Christ and such like things these are the kind of traditions that Paul and the apostles had in mind when they used the word traditions and not ceremonial rites and religious customs.

NOTE: the apostles' use of the word traditions cannot be used to support traditions the Church of Rome holds or any other similar traditions since they are not taught in the New Testament or by Paul or the apostles.

Financial Support.

Paul's says that he and those ministering with him, "Have the right to take financial support" (v9), but they chose not to so that they would set an example to others who desire to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not wrong for ministers to be financially supported, but I wonder what Paul would think of those in the ministry who become mega rich, buy extremely opulent homes and cars that only the rich can afford from the money they receive from proclaiming the Gospel.

Many religious leaders still teach tithing (i.e., every member should give 10% of their wages to the church), but this is not what the New Testament or the apostles teach. Sadly very few religious leaders question this doctrine. The most likely reason for this is because they have either embraced traditional teaching believing it to be correct or because it is not financially to their advantage to do so.

For further information see the following title: -

- Tithing New Testament in, Tithing (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Do not Grow Weary in Doing Good.

2 Thess. 3:11-13 ----- ¹¹For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹²Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

Busybodies: from Strong's Concordance in this context means to meddle intrude, pry or interfere.

Here Paul Commands and encourages everyone to work and support themselves and not to go around gossiping about others, but rather do-good. Not every brother and sister is called to the ministry, but we are all called to do-good, not only to those within the Kingdom of God, but also to those who are outside of it so that we give no occasion for the unbeliever to speak against the Lord and by our good deeds we bring a good report to the Christian faith.

Paul in his previous letter told the Thessalonians to rebuke the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak and be patient with them all (1 Thess. 5:14). Paul is aware that a person can continue to do-good and help others and yet see no change in the person they are helping. When this happens it is very easy to become weary in making the effort to do-good especially when it requires a person's time, emotional stress or physical effort and sometimes financial support.

This is the reason Paul encouraged the Thessalonian brothers and sisters with the words, "Don't give up doing- good." Even when doing-good bears no fruit God sees your self-sacrifice and effort spent for the well-being of others and when the Lord sees a brother or sister serving him in this manner he will store up treasures for them in heaven.

Jesus famous Sermon on the Mount: the constant theme throughout Jesus famous Sermon on the Mount is doing what is right before God by seeking the way of peace in all situations. Jesus in this sermon calls Christians to treat people fairly and with respect, dignity, decency grace compassion, kindness, mercy and to be quick to forgive. Biblically a wicked person is primarily one who deliberately and consciously denies the existence of God and does harm to other humans, in contrast to this a good person is one who worships God and the Lord Jesus Christ and do all they can, to do what is right, and what is just (i.e., fair for all).

To love in the biblical sense is not an emotional attitude, but the keeping of these laws in relation to our neighbour. This is the general law of justice, beyond that; our conduct is to be regulated by relationship. We must render honour and justice to all people wherever due, but we have a particular responsibility to care for our families and those who belong to Christ.

For further information on Jesus Famous Sermon see: -

- Matthew 5 in Commentary New Testament (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Do not regard those who Disobey as an Enemy, but warn them as a Brother.

2 Thess. 3:14-15 ----- ¹⁴If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Ashamed: in this context carries the idea of being chastened humiliated disgraced and embarrassed which shows that the reason for shunning a person is to make them feel ashamed (and in turn hopefully change their ways).

NOTICE: the fabulous attitude Paul expresses here, "If anyone does not obey what he has written do not to think of them as an enemy, but warn them as a brother" this great principle should be extended to all brothers and sisters in similar situations.

Paul Prays for the Thessalonians.

2 Thess. 3:16-18 ----- ¹⁶Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all. ¹⁷I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. ¹⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

The title Paul's gives God in the following verse, "The Lord of peace himself" (v16) shines, a brilliant spotlight on the truth that whenever there is strife, contention, argument and quarrelling Christ is not involved nor is he present.

James in his letter he wrote: -

- If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, it is earthly, unspiritual, demonic because where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice, but the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere and from these comes a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace (James 3:14-18).

Clearly, James and Paul understood that the Spirit of Jesus who they worshipped inhabits peace.

Paul wrote with His own hand: The words, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write" (v17) seems to mean that though a scribe may have written the letter Paul himself wrote the greetings of it himself. It is very much like a person who types a letter, but signs it themselves with a pen to show that they articulated and verbalised the content of what is actually written in the typed letter.

End