Study 17 – Book of Second Thessalonians

Topic: Do not be idle and Paul's general encouragement

Study text: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-18

Outline

I. General encouragement (1-5)
II. Command to live a quiet and disciplined life (6-15)
III. Closing greeting (16-18)

I. General encouragement (1-5)

Discussion Questions

• What final reminders did Paul give to the Thessalonians? Pray for us! Why?
• How did Paul want God's Word to spread? (rapidly) What can we do to make sure that God's Word spreads rapidly?
• What kind of people was Paul referring to in verse 2? Why did he need to be "rescued" from them?
• What final encouragement did Paul offer in verses 3-5?

Cross-References

Philippians 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.

Verse by Verse study

1. Pray for us – Prayer is a two-way street. We have seen Paul's sincere prayers for the churches throughout the epistles. He loves them. Because Paul loves them, he is often thinking about them. From a long distance, he does what he can for them, including paying them visits, sending others to visit, writing letters, and, very importantly, praying for them.

Here Paul makes it clear that prayer should not only be flowing from the leader but also the other way around. This shows that no believer should have a "taking" mentality, even if he is new in Christ. Every believer has certain responsibilities. One of those is to pray regularly for our leaders. These leaders face great opposition from the world and Satan. They are right in the middle of heavy spiritual warfare. Satan would like nothing more than to bring these leaders down and, in doing so, to bring disrepute to the name of Christ.

This is why praying for your spiritual leaders is so essential. How much more could they accomplish with an army of prayer warriors supporting them? We may tend to put certain spiritual leaders on a pedestal, thinking that they are immune to temptation and the struggles we face, but they most certainly are not. Jesus Himself faced great temptation from Satan in the wilderness. And your leaders are not divine like Jesus. Flesh and blood.

Application: Do you regularly pray for your spiritual leaders? How can you begin to make this a habit? What will you pray for them?

2. Verse 1b; that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly – I want to highlight Paul's use of the word "rapid." The word used in Greek is "tre'-khō." Basically, this means haste or running a race. It indicates the idea of exerting oneself, striving hard. When this word occurs in Greek writing, it denotes incurring extreme peril, which requires the exertion of all one's effort to overcome. So, what is the idea here?

Acts 9:15 – But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

3. Just as it did with you – The vision is not impossible to achieve. The Thessalonians were living proof that it can happen, as their lives and their community were quickly transformed in just a short amount of time. From them, the gospel went out to the rest of the province. If we have the right vision and the right model and depend on the Holy Spirit, He can use us to accomplish great things just like He did with the Thessalonians.

4. That we will be rescued – Paul's first prayer request focused on the spiritual side of their mission. His second prayer request was for God's help from evil people who were obstacles to this mission. We have learned that Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica because evil people set themselves up against his mission, trying to thwart the spread of the gospel. However, this was not an isolated case. Wherever Paul went, he faced similar opposition. Sometimes these men even followed him from town to town just to oppose the work that he was doing. These people often made ministry very difficult.

5. Paul's encouragement – Throughout these two letters, we have seen Paul's continued encouragement to the Thessalonians. In this final passage, he continues with even stronger encouragement. He himself is absent, but God would strengthen them and protect them. He would also enable them to continue growing and obeying what they had learned. You see, God delights in using us, but He doesn't actually need us. The world did not fall apart when Paul had to leave the Thessalonians. God's love and care for them did not end.

Philippians 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.

Paul could not be there to see this work completed in their lives, but God was there. Everything we need for life and for godliness is found in God, not in ourselves or in any leader, no matter how good. While this does not negate our responsibility to encourage and teach others, it is a reminder that God is in control and cares for the people we minister to even more than we do. That means we don't have to stress out if everything doesn't go according to plan. Maybe it is going according to plan, just not our plan.

II. Command to live a quiet and disciplined life (6-15)

Discussion Questions

• What did Paul's use of the word "command" show us about his authority? Why did he not command them more often?
• List all of Paul's commands to the Thessalonians in this passage.
• What is an unruly life?
• What tradition is Paul referring to?
• Why should they keep away from this kind of brother? Shouldn't we try to help this type of person?
• Describe the kind of undisciplined life Paul may have been referring to.
• What would the disciplined life we should strive for look like?
• What is the significance of verse 10? How can we apply this verse today?
• How would you describe a busy body?
• What does it mean to work in "quiet fashion"?
• Do you ever grow weary of doing good? If so, why?
• What kind of people should they disassociate with? Why?

Verse by Verse Study

1. We command you. Is his command grievious? – Throughout these two letters, we have seen that Paul primarily encourages the Thessalonians through positive feedback and reminders. But here we see that Paul issues them a couple of commands point blank. From this, we can learn several important principles:

A. Paul did have the authority to give commands. Not using that authority all the time didn't mean he didn't have it.

B. In most cases, it is likely more effective for leaders to use encouragement, reminders, testimonies, sharing, and even pleading rather than giving commands right and left.

C. Just because you are in a position of authority does not mean you have to use it. For example, husbands should not often play the "you should submit to me" card to their wives. There may be times to do that, but if you do it often, this "card" loses its luster.

It is a leader's job to shepherd people's hearts. Before you issue commands, ask yourself if it is really the best way to shepherd their hearts. Sometimes the answer might be yes, but not always.

2. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – This is where Paul's authority came from. He wasn't self-anointed. He was appointed by Christ.

3. Keep away from unruly brothers – In Greek, the word for unruly used here is "ä-tä'k-tōs." It means disorderly, like a soldier out of rank. It could also refer to someone who enjoys immoderate pleasure or deviates from a prescribed order or rule.

A naturally lazy person would be predisposed to deciding to quit his job and "pray, play, and wait" for Jesus' return. It was not only a problem during Paul's time. We have heard stories of so-called believers who do the same thing. What is the problem with this? Among other problems, it is a very bad testimony to unbelievers around us.

Moreover, it is completely the opposite of what the apostles taught and did. Paul said that these people were not following the tradition which they had received from him. In layman's terms, "When we were around you,

did you see us indulging ourselves and just having fun? No, we didn't schmooze off of you. We worked, and we worked hard. Whatever these guys are doing or not doing, they didn't learn it from us."

Paul's command is that they stay away from these people. We should note that it is implied that this letter was read to the whole church, so these brothers who were doing this had a chance to repent. Only those who wilfully continued to disregard Paul's instruction should be avoided. Why should they be avoided?

Proverbs 13:20 – Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

1 Corinthians 15:33 – Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character.

If you hang out with lazy people, it is easy to become lazy like them. At the same time, avoiding these people is a type of spiritual discipline. It reminds them that they are living a life of sin, which is unacceptable to the Lord, and that they must change to be restored. If believers who are wilfully sinning enjoy the same fellowship as everyone else, there is little deterrent in the church to sin. Staying away from these kinds of people is a visible picture of this fellowship, which is broken until the sin is confessed. At first glance, it may seem harsh and uncaring, but in actuality, it is a type of tough love that must be practiced to show just how serious sin is.

Hebrews 12:11 – No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Before taking the step of avoiding believers, what steps should you take?

A. They should be confronted with their sin (Matthew 18:15-20). If people avoid them and they don't know why, it is useless.

B. It is most effective if it is the church as a whole. If only one or two individuals avoid this person, it will not be effective. In fact, a division will likely develop. It must be by agreed upon decision. The leadership should certainly be involved in this decision.

C. It should only be done when the person is in clear violation of the commands of Scripture and has been given an opportunity to repent.

4**. Paul's model of ministry** – As we discussed in 1 Thessalonians, it is good to be a model for other believers as long as we have the right motivation. We need models. Through modelling, the complexities of Scripture and doctrine can be brought down to daily life and shown through practice not just theory. **We should strive to be a good model for others, not to gain followers or glory for ourselves, but to lead people to Christ. In this passage, we see Paul's model of working.**

A. Paul and his co-workers had a right to receive support. Much like the right to command others, this is not a privilege which always has to be exercised. Jesus told the disciples to receive help from the person of peace when He sent them out in pairs (see Luke 10). They were to stay in the house and eat as long as they were in the village. There is a precedent for both taking support and not taking it. Leaders should evaluate on a case-by-case basis what is the best, not for themselves, but for those they minister to.

B. Paul and his co-workers were hard workers. Those called to do ministry should follow their example by working hard. Unfortunately, some Christian workers are lazy. They don't have a typical job or typical hours; neither do they have a boss who is always watching over their shoulder. Many Christian workers are self-motivated and work even much harder than they would in a 40-hour-a-week job.

Application: How can one limit these temptations? How can Christian workers ensure that they are diligent and productive? How can this be applied even to those who are not supported by others or not in Christian ministry?

5. If anyone doesn't work, he is not to eat – Quoting someone**…."I often heard this verse growing up. Generally, my parents reminded us of this verse when we had been less than diligent. Sometimes we also had to skip a meal to remind us of the cost of laziness".**

It is important for kids to learn the importance of work when growing up. Many people reach adulthood without ever having worked an "honest day in their life." Their hands are soft like a baby's. Everything they have has been given to them.

But there is great value to be hardworking.

Application: Do you know how to work? Are you willing to work with your hands? Do you complain when you face hard work? Are you doing your work heartily to serve the Lord rather than men? Work is a good thing, and we should do it to the best of our ability for the Lord.

6. Busybodies – Becoming a busybody is often a natural result of being lazy. An idle person has little to do except get involved in other people's business. And here is an noteworthy lesson. An idle mind is the devil's playground. If we are sitting at home with nothing whatsoever to do, it is very easy for us to fall into temptation. One way to avoid temptation is to keep ourselves busy serving the Lord. If, for example, you are in the middle of sharing the gospel with someone, it is not so likely that you will suddenly jump up and go rob a bank. The pursuit of right things is one protection against temptation we should take advantage of.

7. Verse 12 – Eat their own bread. It doesn't nullify the need for hospitality or generosity. Instead, it is a reminder that we should not be leeches. We should not take advantage of others.

8. Verse 13 – Do not grow weary of doing good. Doing good is not something you did enough of yesterday. There is no limit to how much you should do. We are responsible for ourselves, not others. **So focus on what you need to do and do it no matter what obstacles you face.**

III. Closing greeting (16-18)

Discussion Questions

- What distinguishing mark might Paul be referring to?
- What is the importance of writing the letter with his own hand?
- Wouldn't he normally do that?

Application: What is one important thing you have learned about God in the study of Thessalonians? What is one important thing you have learned about yourself? What is one important thing you need to do in order to obey the lessons we have studied?