

A Study of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians

Week Six

2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:18

Day One

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

v. 13 – Paul was writing to those whom God had chosen to be saved. So did they not have any choice in the matter? I believe they did, choosing to cooperate with God's grace for their lives. There are two verses I think of when I discuss this topic of God's grace and man's choice:

But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John (Luke 7:30).

As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1-2).

Those two verses show me it is possible to reject God's purpose and to receive God's grace in vain. So that leads me to ask you: **Are you cooperating with God's grace for your life? Are you doing all that you can do and being all that you can be? Are you working with God's grace or waiting for God's grace to do what only you can do? There is work for you to do; are you doing it?**

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:12-13).

v. 14 – We share God's glory! That's truly amazing. But this sharing isn't a passive process. Remember what Jesus said when He talked about sharing God's glory:

I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began (John 17:4-5).

What work has God given you to do? Are you doing it? That is the way you can share and then bring God's glory here on earth.

v. 15 – Paul urged them to stand firm and hold onto the teachings he had passed on to them. There are times when you can't do anything else but stand in the midst of trouble or confusion. Do what you know to do and don't waver. If you don't get the results you want, need or hoped for, then keep on doing what you know to do. Trust God for the results.

Day Two

16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. 3:1 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you.

vs. 16&17 – Paul prayed that the God of encouragement and good hope would encourage them in their daily activities. Does that mean that God won't encourage you if you aren't doing good deeds and obeying the word of the Lord? I find people who want encouragement, but they aren't doing anything! They sit in their inactivity, discouraged that their needs aren't being taken care of. They pray for God to bless them, when they aren't blessing anyone else.

What good deeds are you engaged in? I am writing these Bible studies for one reason—to bless people and encourage their study of God's word. I don't charge anything for them. I am doing this in response to an idea I believe the Lord gave me. And when I need encouragement, the Lord is always there to encourage me in my good deeds.

What are your good deeds? Can you describe them? Can you write them down?

This is so important to know for Paul wrote to another church:

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

v. 1 – Paul asked them to pray, but he asked them to pray that his “good deeds” would prosper and increase. Paul's good deed was preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. He wasn't writing that the church would pray for his aunt's goiter (if he even had an aunt who had a goiter). He wrote to ask for prayer that he would succeed in his good deeds that were assigned for him to do.

So I ask you again: What are your good deeds? What does God want you to do? What do you want to do? Don't tell me you're busy or you don't have the money. Everyone has been assigned good deeds to do, including you. Why aren't you doing them? What can you do to do even more of them?

Day Three

2 And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

v. 2 – It was a real eye-opener for me as I began to travel and meet people who weren't just neutral about God but hated God and Jesus! I think Paul met a lot more people like that than I ever will. Paul identified these wicked and evil men as those without faith. Their unbelief opened the door for them to oppose Paul, which meant that they opposed Jesus. Paul was asking for protection from these men so that his mission could be achieved. Paul was always about the mission and we should be as well. God had given Paul something to do and he was going to do it.

Just because God has given you something to do doesn't mean that you won't be opposed. Jesus said:

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Matthew 16:18).

Just because Jesus said that the gate of Hades would not overcome the church doesn't mean that the gates of Hades won't *try* to overcome the church. So if you aren't encountering any opposition, then what are trying to do and build?

v. 3 – Paul identified the real source of the opposition behind wicked and evil men, and that is the evil one, Satan. We will not overcome the devil in our own strength, but with the help of God. Notice that Paul did not say that God would rebuke the devil so he would not bother you. Rather Paul said that our faithful God would protect us and strengthen us as we opposed Satan. God will not always “shoo” Satan away, but help us stand and resist him as he attacks.

v. 4 – Paul said that he had confidence in the Lord. He didn't say he had confidence in the Thessalonians. Do you see the difference? Paul had confidence that God was preserving, protecting and nurturing the church so that they would and could obey what he had taught them. I have walked with the Lord for 31 years, and I am still learning to put my trust and keep my expectations in Him and not in others. Other people will almost always disappoint you, but the Lord will never disappoint you. You just have to trust that what you have is what He wants you to have, even if it is less than you had hoped or asked for.

Have people disappointed you? Then don't be disillusioned, but learn your lessons that God wants you to keep your eyes and hopes on Him and not on others.

v. 5 – Once again Paul was putting his hope in God's work among the people and not in the people themselves. This verse reads like a prayer where Paul was asking God to direct their hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance. **I wonder why Paul**

identified perseverance as that belonging to Christ? Do you have any ideas about that? Does Jesus' life represent perseverance and endurance? I think it does. But what can you see in that?

Day Four

6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

v. 6 – It seems that there were some believers who refused to work. Instead they went from house to house, expecting the saints to feed and care for them. Paul told all of them to stop this practice, much to the joy of those who had to do the feeding! It's my opinion that this attitude has given way to something much different today. Many people believe unless they are working, they will starve.

Now don't get me wrong. I have worked every day of my adult life, so I believe in hard work. But my hard work doesn't provide my food. God provides for me and I work to do His will and extend His kingdom. It isn't my efforts that meet my needs. God meets my needs. I must never put my faith in the economy or my place of employment. I put my faith in God. My degrees don't provide for me—God does.

Where do you put your trust? Who pays you? Who or what is your source? Am I being unrealistic or nit-picky on this point?

vs. 7&8 – In Paul's day, there were traveling teachers who tutored others for pay. Then the apostle and other traveling ministers did the same. Paul endorsed the fact that traveling ministers should receive their support from those among whom they minister:

This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. Don't we have the right to food and drink? Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? **But we did not use this**

right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:3-13 emphasis added).

Yet Paul did not use his rights to support so that no one could discredit his unique work among the Gentiles. Paul was determined that no one would ever say, “He’s in it for the money.” This was a ministry value that directed Paul’s daily decisions. **What are your ministry values?** One of mine is reconciliation, which is why I accept almost every invitation I receive from Africa. I want to be a source of peace and healing in my country and in others, so my value directs my decisions in that regard.

In some ways, I wish this attitude were more prevalent today among those who travel and minister to the needs of the saints. Do you agree?

Day Five

9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." 11 We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. 12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.

v. 9 – So here in another reason that Paul worked while he ministered, rather than taking his support from the people. Paul wanted to provide an example for the saints. Again, there seemed to have been a problem with people not working and expecting others to provide for them as their Christian duty. Paul wanted to refute this practice by showing the way for it to be done differently.

God may have you do something to be a model for others. That is part of being a leader. I feel that my busy schedule and high productivity are serving as models for others. I don’t ever try to impose my schedule or work habits as a rule, but I do hope some will see them and say, “If he can do all that, then I can surely do this.” That is leading by example. **Is there anything similar to this in your life that God is using as an example for others? Does it seem that the “rules” in that situation different for you than for others?** If so, don’t complain, but use that as an opportunity to teach others.

v. 10 – I don’t think for a minute that Paul was talking about the poor, widows or handicapped. He was referring to those who could work but chose not to. Paul was never afraid to address pertinent, relevant issues that impacted the daily lives of the saints. He not only taught doctrine, but showed how that doctrine should be carried out in daily life. This is a good pattern to follow—always look for how you can apply your doctrine to what you do every day with your family, co-workers and fellow believers.

In fact, you may want to give some thought to the question: **Is there anywhere in my life where my daily actions doesn’t match my doctrinal beliefs?** If so, then meditate further on how you can adjust that situation.

v. 11 – These freeloaders were living off other people’s productivity and Paul wanted that stopped. There are times when you must say no to those who ask you for something, without being mean-spirited.

v. 12 – Paul’s answer to these busybodies was for them to find employment and work with their hands. Often there are easy answers to life’s problems and here the solution was, “Get a job!” My problem is of a different sort. I have so many things before me that I could do that I must “Stay focused.” **What is the answer to your current dilemma or situation? Don’t make it more complicated than it is. Ask yourself, “What would Paul say about what I am going through right now?”** You may even want to enter into a make-believe dialogue with him to see what he would say!

Day Six

13 And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. 14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. 15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

v. 13 – I don’t think Paul would write not to tire of doing right unless there could be a tendency for us to do so. **Are you tired of doing right in any area of life? Does it seem like the wicked get ahead, while your goodness is overlooked?** David faced the same issue and this is how he told us to handle it:

7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret — it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land (Psalm 37:7-9).

If you are faced with the success of others who aren’t serving the Lord while your own success tarries, do what David suggested: don’t get angry, don’t fret and worry and put your trust in God to deliver and prosper you.

v. 14 – Paul expected that his apostolic authority would be recognized and that his instruction would be obeyed. He wanted the saints to withdraw from fellowship with someone who disobeyed so that the offender would be ashamed. I think we must be careful exercising this same counsel. I don’t think it should be used across the board for all “offenders.” Paul was dealing with busybodies who were freeloading off others. I think it was those whom Paul urged to avoid, otherwise they would continue to show up at people’s homes expecting food and shelter. The only way to deal with those people was to “cut them off” and not receive them.

v. 15 – Paul was careful to qualify his instructions. Anyone who disobeyed was to be singled out, but the objective was to win their repentance, not to treat them as an enemy. I have known some who cut off an offending brother or sister, and did treat them as

enemies. That isn't the right attitude, I don't think. The goal is always the good of the other person and Paul urged the saints to avoid someone not out of anger, but so that offender could see the error of their ways, repent and return to the fellowship of the church.

Day Seven

16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. 17 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

v. 16 – As I have stated previously, Paul wanted to be a source of peace for all those he served. But Paul knew that the only source of real peace is God Himself. Thus, he prayed that the Lord of peace would give them peace. Paul knew that he wasn't the source of the good things the church enjoyed; God was the source. There are some leaders today who teach that they are the source of the good things in the house of God and expect to be honored accordingly. Paul did not hold this attitude and he never expected anything from his followers except that they obey his commands in the Lord.

Oh, may we have more leaders like Paul in our midst. I want to be a source of peace and joy, so that when I show up, people are glad. I don't want anyone to be uptight or to heap a load of expectations on others as to how I should be treated. I am just a brother who is working in the church, just as others work outside the church. I want to be called John, for that is my name. If anyone needs a title before John, they can use Dr., but that isn't an expectation on my part. I want to be a leader like Paul. **Do you? If so, what can you do now to be more like him? What changes do you need to make in your leadership philosophy?**

v. 17 – Paul obviously dictated the rest of the letter to someone else and now closed it in his own handwriting. This was his distinguishing mark so that the people could recognize it was real and not counterfeit. **Do you work closely enough with others that they can distinguish your ministry from that of others? What is your signature—your values to which you are true in good times and bad?**

v. 18 – As we close this study, I am challenged to be a source of grace and peace. I want to be a blessing to others. With that in mind, I hope you have enjoyed this quick trip through Paul's letters to the Thessalonians. Why not go back now over the six lessons and make a quick summary of what you've learned—what stood out to you from all the lessons that we learned and points that we made. If you joined the study late, take some time to go back over the lessons that were sent before you came on board.

And now, Father, we commit this study to you and ask that you would bless Your word unto our hearts and glorify Your name. I ask that you speak to every reader, making them an effective leader as Paul was. May we continue to excel and do what is right and

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my you use this study to feed many. Also give the readers wisdom of how to take these studies and bless others, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.