

Message #10

II Thessalonians 3:1-5

One of the things that we receive are mailings that are aimed at producing church growth. We receive information about seminars and conferences that are specifically for the purpose of producing this growth. Now most of the things we received are designed to produce numerical growth, not spiritual growth.

When we track the Apostle Paul's ministry as it relates to churches in the New Testament, it is obvious that Paul was very interested in future growth. But the future growth he wanted was a doctrinal and spiritual growth. The numbers didn't seem to much matter to him, but spiritual development did. **Paul knew that one major key to doctrinal and spiritual growth is prayer. If we want true Biblical knowledge and if we want deep spiritual maturity, we must pray for it and about it.**

Let's face it, when we get before the Lord, do you really think He will quiz us about how big the church was? Do you think His assessment will be one of numbers? The answer is no. God will analyze our spirituality. His assessment will be one of how much did we grow and how much did we mature and what did we do for Him.

That point is clear as we come to this final chapter in II Thessalonians. One of the key elements to our growth is prayer.

THE KEY TO REAL SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND EFFECTIVE MINISTRY IS PRAYER.

It seems to me that most people don't understand this point. Most people don't come to prayer meetings and most people go to churches where they don't care if the church takes seriously the responsibility to pray for them. In fact, just last weekend one church in this area promoted a "movie theater Sunday." They set up the lobby like a movie theater where people could get pop and popcorn. One person from this church spoke to a person who went to that church and they said we go because the kids like the hard rock music. There was nothing about studying the Word; nothing about prayer; but hard rock music and popcorn. Do you really think God would praise that church? You must wonder whether or not some of the people are truly saved.

At this church we systematically pray for everyone connected to this church. We pray for men, women and children. We have had people leave this church and go to other churches where this is not happening. They don't seem to care whether or not the church bathes them in prayer, but Paul knew this was a critical part of development.

Now we may notice that **verse 1** begins with the adverb "finally." **This brings us to the final section of the Epistle.** These are the final matters he wants to address with the Thessalonians. This church was very special to Paul. He bragged about this church and he taught this church deeper things than any other church that was in existence. These people loved Jesus Christ; they loved the Word of God and they loved Paul.

There are two main areas of prayer in these verses:

PRAYER AREA #1 – What Paul wanted the Thessalonians to pray for him and his ministry team. **3:1-2**

We may recall that there are many different words used for prayer. Now the specific word Paul uses here when he says, “pray for us” (προσευχομαι), is one that emphasizes going into the presence of God or moving toward God. So Paul wanted these Thessalonians to go into the presence of God, via prayer, and specifically pray for him and his ministry.

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to pray for him and those with him, but not for the kinds of things most people would ask prayer for. There is no question that Paul had his own problems, but it is obvious that he did not want God’s people caught up with his problems, he wanted them focused on the Word of God and work of God.

He did not request that they pray about some headache or toothache he was having. He did not request that they pray for his eyesight problem. He did not ask people to pray for his finances or even his health. Keep in mind that when Paul traveled, he did not get to stay in the best motels and receive a great honorarium for his great teaching. His ministry was very lonely and very tough.

He was an apostle and he and his own team could pray about those kinds of things. What he wanted this church praying about was that the ministry of God would go forward. He wanted God’s Word and God’s work to expand and he wanted the Thessalonians praying for that. No minister, no matter how great a minister, can win the battle alone. You need prayer support.

Grammatically speaking, there were three specific requests for which he wanted the Thessalonians praying:

Request #1 - Paul wanted prayer that the Word of the Lord would spread rapidly. **3:1a**

Many people do not understand the weight and the warfare of accurately expounding the Scriptures. There is a satanic war in the unseen world that is fully at work when God’s Word is accurately taught. If God’s Word is to be powerfully blessed and impacting when a minister proclaims it, there must be the prayer support of the people of God. Without that there won’t be much victory.

Now the first point to observe is that the Bible is “the word of the Lord.” In other words, the Bible is the inspired Word of God. The grace message that Paul was proclaiming was not a man-made message, this was from God. The teachings of Paul and the doctrines of Paul were teachings he got directly from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12). In fact, Paul said he got his Gospel “through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

What Paul wanted was for the Word of God to spread rapidly. The word “rapidly” (τρεχω) is one that emphasizes swift speed (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 450). Paul specifically wanted these Thessalonians to pray that the Word of God and the grace message that he was presenting would spread with great speed around the world.

Keep in mind the world was very religious and it featured all kinds of religious works. In fact, the big enemy of the Gospel in Thessalonica was Judaism. There was a huge contingency of religious Jews that were dedicated to the O.T. Law and their legalistic day observances and man-made traditions who fought grace every step of the way. Paul wanted these Thessalonians praying that God would overrule and cause the true Word of the Lord to spread rapidly. Just as Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray for that, we would ask you to do the same.

Request #2 - Paul wanted prayer that the Word of the Lord would be glorified. **3:1b**

Paul wanted the Word of the Lord to be glorified. The word “glorified” (δοξαζω) is one that means to magnify and praise something and to honor something at the highest level. Now the thing that Paul wanted held up and praised at the highest level was the Word of God. Paul wanted these Thessalonians to pray for that. That people all over the world would realize the holy significance of the Word of God.

Now God’s Word was immediately received and held in high esteem by these Thessalonians. So Paul says at the end of **verse 1**, please pray that the Word of God will do all over the world what it did with you. The Thessalonians loved the Word of God and Paul wanted other people to love it like they did so he asked they pray for that.

Let me commend you who are part of this church. Most people in this church who come consistently are here because they love the Word of God. This is a church much like the Thessalonian church.

As we put up a new sanctuary, it is not about bands, or movies or popcorn; it is about a church that magnifies God’s Word.

We would encourage all of you to pray that God would cause people to fall in love with the Word of God like you have and that it would spread rapidly, and that people would come to this church and become part of it. That is the kind of thing Paul wanted the Thessalonians praying for him.

Request #3 - Paul wanted prayer that God would deliver them from perverse and evil men. **3:2**

The word “deliver” (ρυομαι) is a word that means to deliver or rescue in the sense of drawing to oneself (*Ibid.*, p. 398). What Paul wanted these Thessalonians to pray is that God would draw him and his team to Himself so that he would escape “perverse” and “evil” men.

Now the word “perverse” (ατοπος) is one that refers to men who are unrighteous, improper and out of place in a relationship with God (*Ibid.*, p. 67). The word “evil” (πονηρος) refers to bad, worthless, wicked men (*Ibid.*, p. 372). Now keep in mind that these men are very religious men, but they do not have a relationship with God and they were bad and worthless and wicked. In fact, these were not men of “the faith.” Paul says, that “not all have the faith.” Just because men are religious does not mean they have believed on Jesus Christ.

In other words, these were not men who had believed in Jesus Christ. These were evil works men. People devoted to a religious works system are perverse and evil. They reject Jesus Christ as being the only means of salvation.

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to pray that both he and his colleagues would be delivered from these kinds of evil men who sought to stop the progress and spread of the grace Gospel.

PRAYER AREA #2 – Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know they were praying for them.
3:3-5

In these two epistles, Paul specifically alludes to the fact that he prays things for them at least ten times (I Thess. 1:2; 2:13; 3:9-10; 3:11-13; 5:23; II Thess. 1:3; 1:11; 2:13; 3:3-5; 3:16). It is very evident that Paul wanted these Thessalonians to know he prayed for them. Leadership needs to pray for the church and the people in it.

Now there are certain things that he wanted the Thessalonians to realize. He prayed for these things and they needed to know these things:

Realization #1 - The Lord is faithful to His people and His church. **3:3a**

The Greek text stresses the fact that “the Lord is to be trusted.” In other words, God is always trustworthy and reliable to His people. God’s people may always trust God and believe God.

God has promised He will provide for His people and that He will care for His people and be faithful to His people. God’s people need to realize that.

Realization #2 - The Lord will strengthen and protect His people from the evil one.
3:3b

The word “strengthen” (στηριζω) means God will make one firm and fixed and steadfast (*Ibid.*, p. 418). The word “protect” (φυλασσω) means God will watch over and be on careful guard (*Ibid.*, p. 475). Now specifically God will firmly fix His people and carefully guard His people from “the evil one.”

The preposition “from” (απο) means that Satan comes up alongside of God’s people to attack in a variety of ways, but God specifically causes His people to stand firm and He guards them so Satan cannot topple them.

God is able to protect His people, strengthen His people and keep His people from the evil one and Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know he prayed for that very thing.

Realization #3 - Paul was very confident in the Lord concerning the Thessalonians. **3:4a**

Paul's confidence for the Thessalonians was in the Lord. The word "confident" is one that expresses God's ability to advance and accomplish and produce all great things God intended to accomplish (*Ibid.*, p. 369).

Paul had a great confidence that God would accomplish everything He wanted to do with this church.

Realization #4 - Paul was very confident that the Thessalonians would always grasp and obey Pauline instruction. **3:4b**

The verb "we command" (παράγγελλω) is a word that refers to the specific grace message that was transmitted by Paul. This Pauline grace system was to be viewed as instruction and orders that came from God (*Ibid.*, p. 338).

Paul was confident that the Thessalonians would follow his apostolic instruction. He was confident that God would give them the ability to understand it and defend it. This is significant. He did not want them following the O.T. Law. He did not want them following a religious system of works. He wanted them to grasp and follow his specific grace instruction.

Realization #5 - Paul prayed that the Lord would direct their hearts to a proper level of loving God. **3:5a**

The Greek word "direct" (κατευθύνω) is a rare optative aorist verb. What this means is that the great wish of the Apostle Paul was that God would direct, guide and keep straight the heart of every believer in the Thessalonian church (*Ibid.*, p. 241).

Paul clearly believed that God was able to control the heart of a person and he specifically prayed that God would take charge of the heart of every believer and direct it to love Him.

Realization #6 - Paul prayed that the Lord would direct their hearts into steadfastness in Christ. **3:5b**

Paul also believed that God was capable of developing the heart of a person so that there would be a steadfastness and endurance of Jesus Christ.

Paul wanted these Thessalonians cemented to the grace system that was found in Jesus Christ.