

FINDING STRENGTH / Sunday School- July 25, 2010

Unifying Topic: GOD'S OWN FAITHFULNESS

Lesson Text

I. Strength Through God's Faithfulness (2 Thessalonians 3:1-5)

II. Strength Through God's Discipline (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12)

III. Strength by Doing Good (2 Thessalonians 3:13-15)

The Main Thought: But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. (2 Thessalonians 3:3, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Many people keep their commitments even when it would be easier to do otherwise. What helps people stay committed under adverse circumstances? The texts teach that our ability to stay committed is grounded in God's own faithfulness to us.

Lesson Aim: To encourage believers to live holy lives through God's faithfulness, discipline, and example.

Life aim: To help believers live productive lives that reflect the strength and faithfulness of God.

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- 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:
3:2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith
3:3 But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.
3:4 And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.
3:5 And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.
3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.
3:7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;
3:8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:
3:9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.
3:10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.
3:11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.
3:12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.
3:13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.
3:14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.
3:15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

HISTORY:

In the last part of 2 Thessalonians, Paul is thankful that God has **chosen** the Thessalonians for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth and **called** them by the gospel to obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, **Stand fast** and **hold to the traditions** as they had been taught was what the Thessalonians were exhorted to do.

LESSON:

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 Strength Through God's Faithfulness

Lest you forget, the believers at Thessalonica were suffering severe persecution and all kinds of trouble. So, in these final words, the subject of the request for prayer and the Lord's faithfulness to the believer jump to the forefront. This was one of the reasons Paul was writing to the church: to comfort and encourage them to continue on for Christ. But Paul was in Corinth and he too was suffering all kinds of trouble, including persecution. Paul needed prayer and he needed believers everywhere praying for him and his companions. Paul's focus was not selfish.

1. **3:1** There was the need for the Word to "*have free course*" and to be glorified. Too often the Word has no power or influence among a people. Why?
 - opposition • unprepared hearts • sleepy-eyed listeners • daydreaming minds • unprepared and carnal preachers and teachers.

The list could go on and on. "*Free course*" means to run. It is a picture of an Olympian athlete running in a race; it is the picture of the Word of God spreading all over because it is...

- focused • active • strong • urgent • unflinching • vigorous • powerful

If the Word of God had free course, it would be glorified, that is, souls would be saved and lives changed. People would be freed...

- from sin and its enslavement
- from guilty consciences
- from immoral and evil behavior
- from unjust treatment
- from ignorance
- from worldliness

People would no longer experience emptiness, loneliness, purposelessness, or lostness. They would be free to know the Lord and to commit their lives to reaching and meeting the needs of a world full of desperate people. Note: this is exactly what had happened to the Thessalonian believers. The Word of God had freely run among the Thessalonians: therefore, many had been converted to the Lord. The Word of God had free course!

Believers should always be praying for the ministers and teachers of the gospel—that the Word of God might have a free course as it is preached and taught. Think for a moment: what would happen if the believers of a single church prayed often every day for their minister and teachers? One thing is known: God could not sit still, for He would know that those believers were as sincere and genuine as they could be. He would know that they desperately wanted to reach their community for Christ.

2. **3:2** There was the need for believers to "*be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men.*" Again, remember the situation. Paul knew what it was like to be opposed by wicked people who would not listen to reason. Ministers, teachers, and believers alike are sometimes opposed and attacked by unreasonable and wicked people. People oppose and attack the person who preaches and teaches that God loves the world; that He has provided the way for man to escape death and to live forever because they want to live like they want to, without any interference from God. They deny and ignore God's existence because they oppose anything that reminds them of eternity; of a coming day of judgment. When people lack reason and morality, goodness, and honesty, conscience and decency, they are dangerous. They can hinder both the messenger and the message of the gospel. Therefore, believers need to be constantly praying for God to deliver his people from unreasonable and wicked persons.

3:3 "*But the Lord is faithful...*" believers may fail us: when we stand in the greatest need; when people oppose and persecute us; when the most terrible trials confront us—**Believers may fail...**

- To pray
- to encourage
- to support
- to speak kindly
- to help

But not the Lord! God will go all the way for the believer. He went all the way to the cross.

1. **V3b** The Lord "*will establish the believer*" and keep him from evil. The word "*establish*" (*sterixei*) means to strengthen, secure, make stable or firm, and set fast. The word "*keep*" (*phulaxei*) means to guard. The word "*evil*" can refer both to evil behavior and to the evil one, that is, Satan. The point is this: the Lord is faithful, even if we fail to help one another. God still strengthens and guard us against Satan and his evil followers. In fact, the Lord will strengthen and guard us against all evil no matter what.
 - God will deliver us by working all things out for good.
 - God will deliver us by overcoming our failures and completing His work of salvation in us.
 - God will deliver us by delivering us from death.
2. **3:4** The Lord will motivate the believer "*to have confidence in keeping His commandments.*" The Lord actually works within and energizes the believer to will and do God's pleasure, that is, to keep His commandments. When we sense a stirring, some energy being aroused within our hearts to do good, that is the Spirit of God working within us. The Lord will never leave the believer, not completely; so long as the believer is on the earth. The Lord will continue to work within him. This is the reason Paul had confidence in the Thessalonian believers, that they would keep the commandments of the Word that had been taught them.
3. **3:5a** The Lord "*directs the believer's heart*" into the love of God. This means both God's love for us and our love for God. The word "*direct*" (*kateuthunai*) means to make straight or to be straight. It means to remove obstacles out of the way or to open up. The Lord Jesus Christ takes the genuine believer and opens up his heart; He straightens, directs, and focuses the believer's heart upon the love of God. The result is that the believer learns to love God more and more. His attention and focus becomes more and more set upon God's love. Therefore, when trials, trouble, temptation, and evil attack the believer, he is able to stand in the love of God and overcome the attack.
4. **3:5b** The Lord directs the believer "*to patiently wait for Christ's return.*" The Lord Jesus Christ stirs the genuine believer to keep his eyes upon His return. Therefore, when evil strikes, the believer endures and perseveres; stands in strength and patience; keeping his eyes and heart focused upon the glorious hope of Christ—the hope of conquering death and of living forever and ever in perfection with God—the hope of ruling and reigning throughout the whole universe with Christ.

Time and time again scripture reminds us that God is faithful to protect and strengthen us from the attacks of Satan.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 Strength Through God's Discipline

Now this passage is very important and deals significantly with the subject for our day and time: disorderly workers. Some people in the Thessalonian church were falsely teaching that since Christ's Second Coming could happen any day, people should set aside their responsibilities, quit work, do no future planning, and just wait for Christ. But their lack of activity only led them into sin. In 1Thess.5:14, Paul told them to give a warning to the unruly, but here Paul tells them to separate from the unruly. Some possible causes of their unruliness:

- ¹Some of the Thessalonians had the inherent character weakness of laziness. This notion gains support from the fact that the Thessalonians were new believers - they had not had much time to be conformed to the character of Christ.
- The persecution they were suffering caused them to be in despair of their lives and also to give up their normal activities (including work).
- The nearness of Christ's return led them to the conclusion that they could give up their normal activities.
- On their own authority they claimed the same right of support from the Church that Paul might have claimed. They based this claim on their self-appointed spiritual "*ministry*" activities within the Church.

When admonitions are ignored, stronger steps are required. This is what you are to do;

1. **3:6** Withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly. Who are disorderly?
 - a. What does the Lord mean by "*withdraw*" (*stellethai*)? The word means to stay away from the idle worker; to have no fellowship with him. There is a difference between acquaintanceship, friendship, and fellowship; for fellowship means "*to have in common.*" For obedient saints to treat disobedient Christians with the same friendship they show to other dedicated saints is to give approval to their sins. We are not to put our stamp of approval upon him, nor are we to run the risk of becoming identified with him.
 - b. **3:7** Who are the disorderly? They are the idle, the slothful, and the lazy. They are the persons who refuse to work or who shirk their work or are slack in their work. There are four reasons why we are to withdraw from the disorderly or idle worker.
 - i. Because the idle worker disobeys the instructions of God (**V6**). Note the word "*tradition*" (*paradosin*). It means all the Word of God, whether taught or written.
 - ii. Because the idle worker **has** the example of committed workers (**V7-8**). Paul worked day and night so that he would not owe any man anything. As a minister of the gospel, he had the right to be supported by believers so that he could be free to minister more. But he refused to exercise that right. Why? So that he could set a dynamic example of a diligent worker for the believers (**V9**). Note Paul says *follow us*—follow our example in being a diligent worker.
 1. *You know how ye ought to follow us* (**V7**).
 2. *We have set an example unto you to follow us* (**V9**).
 - iii. Because the idle worker must work or lose his right to eat (**V10**). This is not dealing with those who are honestly unable to work due to disability or being unable to find employment. If a person is able to work, he is to work. If he refuses, he is not to be fed; he is not allowed to sponge off the church, community, or society.
 - iv. Because the idle worker tends to be a busybody (**V11**). The mind of man is an active thing. It is either thinking positive thoughts or negative and evil thoughts. The point is this: an idle person has an idle mind. An idle mind is the devil's playground. This is the reason trouble comes. Why? Because they do not stay busy for the Lord by helping and ministering to the needs of those within the community who are hurting, lonely, desperate, dying or lost.

Paul had a solution and it was straightforward.

- We command you: the Church must cut off support (**V6**).
- We command you: you don't work; you don't eat (**V10**).
- We command: the unruly brothers must resume gainful employment (**V12**).

Discipline is always a requirement when Christians are not adhering to the Lord's command, however He always bring with it the strength we need to accomplish His command.

2 Thessalonians 3:13-15 Strength by Doing Good

3:13 Paul tells the *brethren, be not weary in well doing; don't let the idlers discourage you*, but stick to your job. Be diligent and persevere. Do not slack off no matter what others do. It is easy to grow weary in doing what we know

¹ http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Book_of_2nd_Thessalonians/08_2Thess_3_6-12/2Thess_3_6-12_Notes.htm
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

to be right. "Grow weary" is the verb *enkakeo*, "to become tired, weary," and then "to loose heart, despair." This suggests that some might lose heart in struggling with their idle brothers. Doing what is right would include remaining examples themselves by working, by reprimanding the disorderly idlers of verse 10, and by refusing to support those who refused to work. Along with the Thessalonians, we too need to take heart and continue to do what we know to be right. Be a dynamic example for the Lord.

3:14 *And if any man obey not our Word...have no company with him, that he may be ashamed (v14).* The importance of this discipline is to mark him out and disapprove of his behavior, don't condone it. Let him know that his refusal to work is not acceptable. Do not condone and indulge his idleness. Warning and letting him experience shame are his only hope of changing. Being warned and feeling shame might stir him to repent, get up and get to work.

Yet, remember: We are always to treat the unruly as brothers in Christ whom we are seeking to restore, rather than treating them as enemies whom we are seeking to destroy (3:15).² "Not as an enemy" means "not as one who is opposed to Christ." "But as a brother" could be taken to mean "as though he were a brother," but the idea is "because he is a brother, i.e., a fellow member of the body of Christ." This draws our attention to a couple of important principles in church discipline.

- First, is the fact that the goal of church discipline is never punishment, but tough actions of love done with a view for reformation and restoration to fellowship with Christ and the body of Christ.
- Second, is the issue of extremes. Rather than being balanced, as with the Lord Jesus who was full of "grace and truth," people tend to go to extremes—they are either too lenient or too harsh. Thus, Paul stresses they were not to be treated as enemies, but admonished as brethren, and as fellow believers.

SUMMARY:

³Paul's letter of his final words is soliciting prayer for he and his companions; that the Word of the Lord might have free course and be glorified, and that he might be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men (1-2). Confident in the Lord to establish and guard them from the evil one, he is also confident that they will do the things he commands them (3-4). He follows with a prayer that the Lord directs their hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ (5).

One last item needs to be discussed, and that is the need for disciplinary action towards those who are walking disorderly and not according to the tradition received from Paul. Reminding them of his own example of laboring night and day while with him, he charges that if anyone will not work; neither should he eat (6-10). Paul had heard there were members who had stopped working, and had become busybodies. He exhorts such members to work in quietness and eat their own bread. If they do not, the others are to note such persons and not keep company with them, that they may be ashamed. Such disciplinary action was to be administered in a brotherly way, not as toward an enemy (11-15).

In today's society, many Christians too often forget that we are the fruit of our Father's tree. As such, the fruit we bear should always reflect our godly lineage. It is easy to appear Christlike on Sundays. What type of fruit do we bear under stress or during times of pain, anger, confusion, or suffering? Does our testimony still reflect our Father? In good times and in bad, God is always in control. With this assurance, we as Christians have no reason to forget who we are and, more importantly, to whom we belong. Therefore, we are able to find strength in Him.

APPLICATION:

Make a list of people you know who might be weary in their walk of life. It may be because of their job, their marriage, their children etc. Have you let them know you recognize and appreciate them? Decide how you can offer them encouragement; where to find strength in the midst of what they're going through. Let them know you are praying for them. Then be sure that you are not one of the idle ones but one that the Lord is working in. Do not condone the disorderly!

² http://bible.org/seriespage/final-exhortations-regarding-idleness-church-2-thes-36-18#P811_237917

³ http://executableoutlines.com/2th/2th_03.htm