

Living a Prayerful and Orderly Christian Life

2 Thessalonians 3:1-9

2 Thessalonians 3:1-9 - *“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, ² and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.*

³ But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. ⁵ Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

⁶ But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; ⁸ nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, ⁹ not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.”

Background Notes

Athens is the largest city in Greece – but what’s the second largest city in Greece today? (Hint: it has something to do with our study on Thessalonians.) As you likely guessed it’s Thessalonica (or Salonica), with a population of about a million people, an international airport, and a major university.

The apostle Paul wrote both 1 and 2 Thessalonians soon after the church was founded in that city. His specific reason for writing the letters was to answer the Thessalonian believers’ questions about the Lord’s return. Thus the major theme of both 1 and 2 Thessalonians is the return of the Lord.

In his teaching about future events, Paul clearly differentiated between the “Rapture” and the “Day of the Lord.” The Rapture of the Church is *imminent*. This means that the Lord could come back at any time for His Church. No prophetic signs must be fulfilled before the Lord returns for His Church. He could come today!

On the other hand, very specific prophetic signs are associated with the Day of the Lord. Events that will be included in the Day of the Lord are the coming Tribulation period of the End Times, the return of the Lord to this earth in judgment, and the glorious thousand-year reign of Christ on this earth. All of this is part of the Day of the Lord.

As we’ve seen from 2 Thessalonians 2, the events of the Day of the Lord cannot take place prior to the Rapture, and they cannot occur unless certain prophetic signs are in place.

In view of these great doctrinal truths, the apostle Paul concluded his epistles to the Thessalonian believers with some practical teaching for godly living. These teachings are just as important for believers today as they were for believers of the 1st century.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers should follow the model prayer life of the apostle Paul.

The apostle Paul realized the importance of prayer. In these verses, Paul asked the Thessalonian believers to pray for him (v1), just as Paul also prayed for the Thessalonian believers (v5). We should follow Paul's example. We should request our fellow believers to pray for us - and we should pray for our fellow believers.

Notice the apostle's prayer requests: *"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith"* (v1-2). Notice - Paul did not request prayer for his own personal needs, like good health and financial support. Although personal requests wouldn't have been wrong - Paul's primary concern was for the work of the Lord!

That's is a biblical model for us to follow. As we spread the word of God, let's pray that it would spread efficiently and effectively (v1). And let's pray for protection from unreasonable and evil unbelievers (v2). Paul was facing opposition from the unbelieving Judaizers and other unbelievers, and we will face opposition as well. Over the years I've led a number of Bible studies. In every case, there has always been some form of opposition that required prayer. The enemy is out there. There is opposition.

Right now, I'd ask you to pray for the ministry of the Growing Christians website. You can find it at: www.growingchristians.org. Please pray that through this teaching ministry, the Word would spread around the world. In addition, please pray that the website would be preserved and protected from any form of opposition from unbelievers.

In verses 3-5 reveal Paul's prayerful concern for the Thessalonian believers. After assuring them that they were protected from Satan by God Himself, and after commending them for their present and future obedience (v4), Paul specifically prayed that their hearts would know more of the love of God, and that their lives would know more of the patience of Christ.

This is another great model for us to follow as we pray for fellow believers. It's certainly OK to pray for the health and physical well being of fellow believers, but notice Paul's priorities:

- He wanted them to know more about the love of God.
- He wanted them to know more of the patience of Christ.
- He wanted them to be established in the faith.

- He wanted them to be guarded from satanic attack.
- He wanted them to continue to be obedient to God's Word.

When was the last time you prayed like that for a fellow believer? When was the last time you prayed for a fellow believer as Paul prayed for the Thessalonian believers? We tend to pray for people's health and well being – and that's not wrong. But let's not just pray for fellow believers when they're sick or out of a job.

When we get to Heaven, I'm sure we'll regret that we didn't put a much greater emphasis on prayer in our lives. We need to pray more! We can become so busy, even in the work of the Lord, that we don't pray enough.

Believers should follow the model prayer life of the apostle Paul.

2. Believers should follow the model lifestyle of the apostle Paul.

Verses 6-9: *"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, ⁹ not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us."*

Twice in these verses, Paul exhorted the Thessalonian believers to **follow his example** (v7&9) – the example of his **lifestyle** (v8). Although Paul probably ate a free meal here and there, and he certainly received occasional gifts of financial support, his point here was that he was not a freeloader. He didn't sponge off fellow believers – he was self-supporting. Acts 18 indicates that Paul knew the trade of tent making, and he would fall back on this means of support when the need arose. Rather than be a burden on the poor Thessalonian believers, Paul "moonlighted" (v8).

Paul was an apostle, so he did not have to support himself this way (as he explained in verse 9), but he supported himself to set an example for the Thessalonian believers - and for us. Paul led a structured lifestyle. There was not a lazy bone in Paul's body!

However, it seems that some Christians in Thessalonica were not working at all. They were lazy freeloaders who expected their fellow-Christians to support them. This was disorderly, Paul said, and this lazy lifestyle was not to be encouraged. They were **not** to be supported. In fact, the believers were to separate or withdraw from them (v6). This doesn't mean that the lazy people were to be excommunicated from the local church. It means that the believers were to withhold support from anyone who was able to work, but wasn't working. No financial support, and no social fellowship. Verse 6: *"... withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us."*

Paul's point was that, if at all possible, every individual or every family should be self-supporting. Laziness and freeloading are not characteristics of the Christian life! Those who can work should work, whether in a secular job or in full-time Christian work. Each local church has a responsibility to help those who are in need and those who can't work (such as the widows in 1 Timothy 5). Scripture is filled with that teaching. But those who **can** work **should** work! The church should not support people who can and should work – but won't work.

A Christian man I know should have a job. He has good health, and he has a good education. But he refuses to work. He lives on welfare. 2 Thessalonians 3 says that his fellow believers should not support him in any way. I trust no one who is listening to this Talk is a shirker or a freeloader!

Believers should follow the model lifestyle of the apostle Paul.

Practical Application

You don't have to fear the devil.

Verse 3: *"But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one."*

Do you know any Christians who **fear** the devil? People who fear Satan spend far too much time thinking and worrying about him, and doing things to prevent the devil from "getting them." This is spiritually unhealthy and unbiblical.

We should be aware of Satan and his evil schemes, and we should be alert and aware of his tactics and strategy. However, the promise of this verse is that **if we're walking with the Lord, we don't have to fear the devil!** If you're trusting the Lord, you don't have to worry about a demon jumping out of the bushes and attacking you on a dark night. The Lord is our protection. Here's the promise: *"But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one."*

If you're worried about Satan, remember the story of Job. Satan could only do what God allowed! The Lord is faithful! You don't have to fear the devil.