

## 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

### Keeping the Church Supernatural

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- The church in the Western World is not very well in tune with the reality of the supernatural.
- Our regular assumptions cause us to associate supernatural activity with tabloid headlines, superstition or weirdos.
- Perhaps worst of all, we can connect the supernatural component of Christianity with the craziest Christians we've ever known.
- Keeping the Church Supernatural
- C.S. Lewis understood this phenomenon well:

"There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight." - C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

- The reality of the supernatural applies to the demonic.
- It also applies to the kind of relationship God wants to have with us.
- By being excessively "practical" or "this-worldly," we deny ourselves the richest aspects of what God desires to do in our lives.
- We'll see this in **2 Thessalonians 3:1-5**.

### Prayer Is a Vital Component of Preaching and Teaching (v.1)

- Paul's request: "Pray for us."
- The Greek means "**Keep on praying for us.**"
- See **Psalm 147:15**. Paul probably has this in mind about the word running swiftly.
- God's word has the power to accomplish whatever God wants.
- Paul is no doubt confident of this.
  
- He needs prayer because he is not especially confident in himself.
- Therefore, Paul desires prayer for himself and his associates.
- "**Keep on praying for us.**"
  
- Why is prayer so important to those engaged in the ministry of the Word?
  - It helps them to live a just and holy life.
  - It helps to keep their mind clear from unhelpful distractions during their efforts.
  - It helps them to prepare Spirit-led messages.
  - It helps them to deliver those messages clearly and boldly.
  - It helps by preparing the hearts and minds of the hearers.

- The words of E.M. Bounds are more true now than they were a century ago:

"This is a day that has urgent need of men after the mold of the great apostle – men of courage, brave and true, who are swayed not by the fear of men, or reduced to silence or apology by the dread of consequences. And one way to secure them is for the pew to engage in earnest prayer for the preachers." E.M. Bounds (1835–1913)

- Application:
- Pray for the effectiveness of those who preach and teach God's word.

### A Church That Preaches the Word Can Expect to Meet Opposition (v.2)

- Paul endured more than his fair share of persecution.
- In Thessalonica his enemies gathered a mob and set the whole city in an uproar when Paul had only been there less than a month.
- He had to flee to another city and his enemies even followed him there.
  
- Paul realized that if he was going to be able to continue a ministry in a given place over a long period of time, he would need prayer.
- God's ministers need the protection that only God can give them.
- In the Book of Daniel as well as Acts, we have evidence that angels respond and come to the aid of God's servants in answer to prayer.
  
- So **pray for us**.
- As a former persecutor of the church himself, Paul knew how his opponents thought:
- Not everyone will believe the gospel message – not all have faith.
  
- Application:
- Pray for the protection of those who preach and teach God's word.

### Our Biggest Opposition is in the Supernatural Realm (v.3)

- Paul now tells the Thessalonians what he knows God will do for them.
- As we've seen, the work of the gospel is not a merely human endeavor.
- Even though victory is assured, the opposition can be intense.
- We need the strength and protection that only God can provide.
  
- Paul reminds the Thessalonians of God's faithfulness.
- God is dependable.
- He can be relied upon in any and every circumstance.
- It is sane and sensible to put our trust in Him.
- The nature and integrity of God should make Him the object of our confidence.
  
- God will *establish* you.
- The word **Establish**:
  - 1) to make stable, place firmly, set fast
  - 2) to strengthen, make firm
  - 3) to render constant, confirm one's mind
- Paul probably prayed prayers like **Psalm 90:17**.
- This church was the object of Paul's labors and he was assured God would answer his prayers.
  
- And guard you from the evil one.
- See *The Lord's Prayer* in Matthew 6.
  - Verse 13 literally includes a prayer for protection from "the evil one" – one of the ways that Jesus referred to the devil.
- Jesus has instructed us to pray this way.
- It is totally appropriate to do so and to expect the Father to answer.
- Read verse 3 again and think of it as a personal promise.
- Application:
- Commit yourself daily to living a life of trust in the Lord.

#### Obedience Is a Supernatural Activity (v.4)

- Some of the confidence that Paul expressed in v.3 may be based on what he knows of the Thessalonians – which he expresses in v.4.
- Christ is faithful, but we must be obedient.
- We can't expect the blessing of God upon our lives as long as we insist on living our lives in blatant disobedience.
  
- This is perhaps best illustrated in Christ's picture of building our house upon the rock at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.
- See **Matthew 7:24-27**
- If we want our foundation to be firm, if we want to be truly established in our faith, then obedience is an essential component.
  
- Most of us probably have the experience of getting caught up in a particular sin, and then beginning to experience all kinds of doubt in our hearts.
- God uses our obedience to deepen our inner level of assurance.
  
- Here are some references from 1 John that speak to this very topic – Assurance:
  - Assurance that we know God – **1 John 2:3**
  - Assurance of answered prayer – **1 John 3:22**
  - Assurance of "abiding", meaning continuous or uninterrupted relationship with God – **1 John 3:24**
  - Assurance that we genuinely love God and love others – **1 John 5:2-3**
  
- Application:
- Commit yourself daily to living a life of obedience to Christ.

#### Whatever You Do, Always Remember That God Loves You! (v.5)

- Paul now expresses a final wish, his desire and his prayer for the Thessalonians.
- The **patience** he mentions is more like steadfastness or patient endurance.
- This can be either:
  - Christ's endurance as a model for us, or
  - Perseverance as a quality imparted by Christ to us.
  
- **Direct** means to straighten, to clear away the hurdles, to remove all obstacles or hindrances.
- Paul wanted them to have as direct an access as is possible to the love of God.
- Even though we may know the Bible says that God loves us, it may be hard for us to understand or believe.
  
- Our conscious access to God's love can be hindered by our imperfect faith or understanding.
- Our experiences with imperfect, unloving humans may color our impressions of a perfect and completely loving God.
- These obstacles need to be removed.
- The crooked path from our heart to God's love needs to be made straight.  
Crooked (picture)  
Straight (picture)
- Ask yourself this question – seriously:
  - Do you know that your heavenly Father loves you?

- Here we need to distinguish between two types of knowledge.
  - Knowledge of facts
  - Knowledge by experience
- In this case a knowledge of facts might mean that we know a few Bible verses about God’s love.
- Can you think of any?
- But we need to also know this by experience – and this is what Paul is praying about for the Thessalonians.
- He wants them to have a direct experience of God’s love in their hearts.
- We also need to overcome the influence of a culture that has so used and abused the idea of the love of God that the statement,
  - “God loves you.”
 has almost become meaningless.
- It is more like a Christmas or Birthday wish and not something we ever deeply consider.
- And even reading about God’s love in the Bible, we can easily let it become just a dry, lifeless text to us.
- We can ignore the supernatural reality that the Bible intends us to encounter, both through its pages and in the most intimate regions of our hearts.
- Now let’s try this again:
- Do you really *know* that your heavenly Father loves you?
- I’m convinced not all of us do.
- And even when we do, we don’t always remember that we do.
- We forget the experiences through which God has encouraged us in the past.
- Whatever You Do, Always Remember That God Loves You! (v.5)
- A few Bible passages:
  - **Romans 8:37-39**
  - **Titus 3:4-6**
  - **1 John 4:9-11**
- And finally, one more time:
- Do you really *know* that your heavenly Father loves you?
- Whatever You Do, Always Remember That God Loves You! (v.5)
- Application:
- Take time to meditate daily on the supernatural reality of the love of God.
- Keeping the Church Supernatural:

#### Five Separate Things to Take Home

1. Pray for the effectiveness of those who preach and teach God’s word.
2. Pray for the protection of those who preach and teach God’s word.
3. Commit yourself daily to living a life of trust in the Lord.
4. Commit yourself daily to living a life of obedience to Christ.
5. Take time to meditate daily on the supernatural reality of the love of God.