

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Introduction

We are going to focus mainly on verse 5, with a few preliminary words about v1-4.

Finally, Brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured (2 Thessalonians 3:1) – the Greek word προσευχεσθε means “pray continually”. Paul probably knew they were already praying for him; so he says, “keep on praying”, don’t give up. The Greek word τρεχη , translated “spread rapidly” (NIV) or “have free course” (AV), literally means “may run”. Paul is picturing the Word of God as active and vigorous, moving swiftly to accomplish the divine purpose. He also wanted the Thessalonians to pray that the message would be glorified or honoured as they see its effect on people.

It is very moving to think that this spiritual giant asks for prayer from the Thessalonians, with all their weaknesses. It shows us Paul’s humility. He also asks prayer for deliverance **from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith** (2 Thessalonians 3:2). The word used for faith here may simply mean “faith” or “trust”, or it could mean “the faith”.

But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one (2 Thessalonians 3:3). It is not enough to be converted, Paul desires them to become mature in their faith, and wants them to be kept and guarded from the evil one. (This could mean “evil”, or “the evil one”; there is the same ambiguity in the Greek as we find in the Lord’s Prayer.)

In verse 4 Paul rests his confidence in the Lord and therefore he has confidence in the Thessalonians, because he knows that God perfects what He has begun in men.

Thus these first four verses give us some ideas for our prayers: to pray continually; to pray that God’s Word will be effective and glorified; to pray that God will establish and keep His people safe.

Now we come to consider verse 5 in more depth. **May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance** (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

God’s love

Is Paul referring to God’s love for us, or our love for God? Probably both ideas are here. We need to come into a deeper understanding of His love for us. Then our love for Him will grow. His love is the source of our salvation and all the blessings we enjoy. We need to consider its greatness and depth. He loves me as if there was no one else in the world to love. His love never ceases and is always constant. Whatever our condition and need, His unfailing love meets our need of security, which is so basic.

This contemplation of His love leads us to deeper love for Him. Our love for Him can be so fitful and uncertain. The greater our love for Him, the more we want to please Him and do His will. Augustine said, “Love God and do as you like” – which may sound a dangerous thing to say, but it will mean in practice that we shall do what He likes.

Christ’s perseverance

In the AV this phrase is translated “the patient waiting for Christ”, but this is not a good translation. The Greek just says “the patience of Christ”. Paul is reminding them of Christ’s patience and endurance throughout His life. Therefore he prays that they may reproduce it likewise. We recall Christ’s patience in life, character, suffering, agony, and at the Cross. And also His patience with us in our failures and weaknesses.

We are to demonstrate similar patience. Patience in His service, when we see no results; patience in prayer when we don’t immediately get answers; patience in waiting for Him to reveal His will in a certain matter; patience in waiting for His coming. *υπομονη* also means steadfast persistence in the path of duty despite all that is arrayed against us.

Nervous breakdowns are more and more common, as people feel they cannot cope with life. People are afraid to look ahead. But the Christian has the promise that while others break, Christ can help him remain erect. While others collapse, the Christian can go on. This is possible when the love of God and strength of Christ is in the life. Then we can face anything. This lifts us above the ills of life and helps us to keep the course, come what may.

May God direct your hearts

We need help and guidance in these things. We can experience the present and personal influence from Christ upon our hearts. He gives present inward guidance through His Spirit. So often we do not expect this, and therefore do not experience this. Thus we live below our privileges. Frequently we dwell on what He did 1900 years ago, or what He did for us a long time ago. But since He is in us today as we trust Him, He should be putting forth His power, leading us to a holier life, deeper love, and more fervent consecration.

Christ is ready to direct our hearts into these things, but we must yield to Him, our guide. He is ready to direct our hearts if we will let Him. It all depends on our yielding to that sweet direction, as loving as a mother’s hand on her child’s shoulder. What should we do?

Firstly we must *desire* this. Do we really want to be led by the Lord into a deeper experience? Do we want Christ to lay His hand on us? Even if it is going to cost us the world and self? Secondly we must *expect* this. We must be counting on His promise, and acting as though we believe His Word. Then we need to *be very still* to hear His voice. We shall not hear that still small voice amid the clamour and noise of our busy lives. Finally we must *follow Him* at once as He speaks and directs. To delay may be fatal. Keep close to His heels and then we shall be safe. We must abandon

self, and admit to the Lord that we cannot guide ourselves, and ask Him to direct our wandering feet. This prayer will not be in vain. His direction will lead us into experiences of love and patience, which will surprise us.

These present experiences strengthen the hope of future perfection. We can then accept and experience the words of the Psalmist: **You guide me with your counsel, and afterwards you will take me into glory** (Psalm 73:24).