

THE FOCUS OF A GENUINE SPIRITUAL LEADER

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 (KJV)

^{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:

² And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all *men* have not faith.

³ But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep *you* from evil.

⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

⁵ And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

When Paul closes this particular letter to the Thessalonians, in coming to chapter 3, you hear those things that are heavy on the heart of one of God's greatest servants that ever walked the earth. It was always heavy on the heart of Paul to declare the precious truth of God, and in this last chapter, you hear voiced from Paul those things that he yearns to relay to the saints of God as they continue to walk through their lives. It is important to remember that these saints were being persecuted and suffering troubles of all types, therefore, there is a good possibility that some of these saints may hear Paul's words, and then shortly face the very real possibility of death. When you are talking to a person that is facing suffering, you take no time talking about the "incidentals" of life, but rather "the essentials". For Paul knew these saints need encouragement, help and hope.

1. THERE IS A FOCUS ON INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LORD. Paul made it clear to these fellow believers that they were "dear" to him. In one translation, the first three words are "finally dear brothers". To the apostle Paul, these saints were not a problem, or difficulty to his life, they were dear to him, because they were dear to the Father. Paul, though considered the greatest apostle made it clear to these precious saints that he needed them. He asked for their prayers. He was in need of their prayers and prayer support, and he was in dire need of them. Christianity is not a focus on a religious system, but rather it is a focus on a Loving God who has created mankind for a warm, loving intimate, daily relationship with Himself not for time but for eternity. Paul would not allow himself to be misdirected from the intimate relationship from his brothers in Christ...for he knew that he would share their company for all eternity. Though Paul had faced many difficulties and even hurts in his life, you hear him speaking words of love, care and kindness. For that is the way of a genuine spiritual leader.

2. THERE IS A FOCUS ON THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER. Paul was in Thessalonica to comfort the saints, but he too needed comforting, as he was facing all types and kinds of persecution for the gospel he carried, and shared. The life of Paul was a lonely life in many ways. He was not received by friends or family. He was rejected and considered an outcast. Even those in the church misunderstood him in many ways. Yet, Paul never lost his intimate relationship with the Lord as well as others. It was the heart's desire of this spiritual giant to ask others to pray for him. Paul knew well that nothing good, or eternal is accomplished apart from prayer and the moving of God's hand. Paul knew that God moved when people prayed, and God listened to the prayers of his people. It is interesting that Paul didn't pray for: comfort, personal needs, or for God take him away from these people. But rather his heart's desire in prayer was very focused. Paul asked the saints to pray first for the Lord's message to spread rapidly and triumph wherever it went. Second, Paul encouraged them to pray that converts would be won everywhere. Deep within the heart of a man or woman of God who truly honors the Lord, there is a heart that prays, not sporadically, occasionally, but faithfully, daily, regularly, specifically in obedience to the Word of God. Paul well knew that "ye have not because ye ask not". Not to pray is not to receive what only the Father can bring. It is only in communion with God that the world is moved and ordered according to His plan. Billy Graham was asked once the secret to the success of his crusades, to which he answered there are three things that bring about the success of the crusades...prayer...prayer and more prayer. There is no true spiritual leadership, successful leadership apart from a heart that is completely depended on the Father. Without prayer it is impossible to advance the purposes and the agenda of God. For prayer gets what only God can give.

3. THERE IS A FOCUS ON ADVANCING THE LORD'S MESSAGE THROUGH PRAYER. Sadly to many preachers and leaders there is a concern for advancing programs, budgets and buildings. It was heavy on the heart of Paul that one thing and one thing only be advanced...the cause of Christ, and His kingdom. The Living Bible puts verse 1 in part this way, "Pray first that the Lord's message will spread rapidly and triumph wherever it goes, winning converts everywhere." Because of the fallen world, the deception of Satan, the Word is often hindered. It was the prayer of Paul

that the gospel have “free course” all over the world. The phrase “free course” is a picture like that of an Olympian that runs in a race without restraint. When the gospel has free course, lives are changed, souls are saved and people are freed from the power of sin, the bondage of sin, and sinful habits. There is freedom from a life of immorality and evil. There is freedom from the wrath of God. There is freedom from an empty life. The reason for so many premature deaths, suicides, is found in the reality that many people feel that life has no meaning. When the gospel invades a life, that life has meaning, purpose, and is ordered according to the plan of God. It was heavy on the mind of Paul that the message of God be advanced, and that lives be saved and redeemed from an empty meaningless life. “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” (Acts 13:48).

It was on the very heart of Jesus to bring about freedom from sin...for He knows the fate of every person that rejects Him. When the gospel is advanced, people are saved, homes are rescued, lives are changed, society is made better, cities are made better and governments are made better through the power of the gospel of Christ.

4. THERE IS A FOCUS ON NEW CONVERTS ADDED TO THE KINGDOM. It was Paul’s prayer that the Lord’s Word spread...reaching new converts everywhere. Paul knew well what it was to be a convert, for he himself was one. At one time he rejected Jesus, the truth, and persecuted all that were followers of Jesus. Yet, in the mercy and grace of God, God redeemed Paul and he became a “convert” of the gospel. We do well to remember what happens out salvation, when we are converted to Christ from sin: 1) Our sins are forgiven, 2) We are transferred out of the kingdom of darkness in to the kingdom of light, 3) We are given the Holy Spirit to live within us and abide with us. 4) We have access to the God of all creation, and He becomes our Father. 5) We are adopted into the family of God and removed from the family of Satan, sin and darkness. 6) In truth we change “father’s”...from one who condemns us demeans us to one that is all-loving, all-caring, all-kind, and provides His best for us all through life.

5. THERE IS A FOCUS ON DELIVERANCE FROM INTENSE SITUATIONS. Paul knew well that this life is marked with many intense situations, simply because we live in a fallen, wicked world. Yet, Paul knew well that his heavenly Father could deliver him, and that was his petition. To hear the very words of Paul is to hear “dependence” on his Heavenly Father in all circumstances of life. When we grow to really depend on our Father, we cast all concerns at His feet, knowing He cares for us.

5. THERE IS A FOCUS ON SPIRITUAL MATURITY. Paul had given his life for the purpose of the gospel. It was his heart’s desire that the saints of God “grow strong”. When a person “grows strong” in the faith, they are not easily swayed by the winds that come down the pike in this wicked world. A “strong Christian” is rooted and grounded in the faith. He is stable, and not easily uprooted from his belief in the risen Christ. When a person is spiritually mature consider what becomes of his life. 1) He lives in security knowing His Father will provide, 2) He lives trusting His Father, 3) His life radiates to family, 4) Children and family are affected by his spiritual maturity (only God knows the countless millions that have been affected by Paul’s one life). 5) He lives receiving the blessings of God, for his life is a walk of obedience, even in the dark times of life.

6. THERE IS A FOCUS ON PRACTICING GODLINESS. Could it be said of our lives that it is our desire to practice godly living? What is the difference between good living and godly living? Godly living at the very root seeks first and foremost to live to please the Heavenly Father, while “good living” may involve morality apart from any desire at all to please the Lord God. It was Paul’s desire to live first pleasing the Father and doing what He directed, commanded and guided him to do. He yearned to please the Father, because he knew the love of the Father. Godliness is marked first with a love for God and the heart’s yearning to obey Him and please Him.

7. THERE IS A FOCUS ON LEARNING THE LOVE OF THE FATHER. It is the desire of our Heavenly Father to “bring us” to a deep abiding understanding of His love for us. He doesn’t love us because of our goodness...for we have none. He doesn’t love us because we are worthy of loving because we are not. He loves us out of the overflow of His nature. It is the nature of our Father to love us, to lovingly care for us, to lovingly discipline us as we need it, to lovingly provide for us. He doesn’t treat us as our sins deserve, but He desires to shower us with the overflow of His love. Love from God’s vantagepoint means He loves us unconditionally. His love means: 1) He wants to give us what we don’t deserve. 2) He doesn’t want to give us what we do deserve. 3) He wants a personal and loving relationship with us. 4) Out of His love He yearns to give to us His best. 4) He yearns to involve us in His kingdom activity. All out of an overflow of His love.