

THE RIGHTEOUS WAYS OF GOD
2 Thess. 1:1-10

Intro: This Epistle was written only a matter of months after the first Epistle, and in many ways it deals with the same two prominent subjects of suffering and the coming of the Lord.

Suffering always brings the believer to consider the righteousness of God's ways, when often they seem so unrighteous from the human point-of-view. There evidently had been no let-up in the persecution of the Thessalonians, and so Paul was constrained by the Holy Spirit to write to them again.

The emphasis in these first 10 verses seems to be in the statements which occur in verses 5 and 6 where the word "righteous" is used in each verse.

But before we get to that, let us look at the verses which lead up to them.

The first thing that ought to impress us as we begin this second Epistle is . . .

I. ITS SIMILARITY WITH 1 THESSALONIANS.

They both begin the same way.

- A. The same team is together: Paul, and Silas, and Timothy.

How wonderful it is to see such oneness and such fellowship among servants of the Lord.

- B. The same greeting (2 Th. 1:2).

Two things can be said about it.

1. It speaks of the continuing need in the lives of the Thessalonian believers for these same gifts from God: "Grace . . . and peace . . ."
2. It shows the continuing sufficiency of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to supply such gifts.

Note in verse 1 that the church was "in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

3. The same thanksgiving (2 Th. 1:3, 4).

It is concerned with three things:

- 1) With the growth in their faith.
- 2) With the increase of their love for each other.
- 3) With the patience and faith that they had manifested in all of their sufferings.

But the significant thing about these three things is that Paul had been praying for them, especially in connection with the first two! See 1 Thess. 3:9-13.

God does answer prayer!

But His answer went even beyond what Paul expressed in His first Epistle. This, too, is characteristic of God. We feel that we need to know every need, but the Lord goes beyond our requests to encourage us to keep praying.

And it was the work that was being done in the hearts of the Thessalonian believers that enabled them to stand up under all of their sufferings.

But, in order that they might know that the Lord was righteous in all of His dealings with them, Paul begins immediately to speak of . . .

III. THE JUSTIFICATION OF GOD'S WAYS (2 Th. 1:5-10).

This is mentioned in two respects:

- 1) One has to do with the Thessalonians themselves.
- 2) The second has to do with their persecutors.

A. God justified in the sufferings of the Thessalonians (2 Th. 1:5).

They were concerned about the coming of the Lord, and the last things. God was concerned about what they would be at that time.

Cf. Peter's words along this line in 1 Pet. 1:6-9 and 4:12, 13.

It was their behavior in their trials which was a "token," a proof, of the righteous judgment of God. God had not left them alone in their sufferings. He had been giving them "grace . . . and peace," and their lives were showing the faithfulness of God.

B. God to be justified in the final judgment of unbelievers (2 Th. 1:6-10).

The first was present; this, future.

There is an apocalypse coming--an apocalypse of the Lord Jesus. See v. 7. And then Paul went on to describe the awful destiny of those who do not know God, and who have not obeyed the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to verse 10, in that day there will be no doubt in any believers heart concerning the righteousness of God at the end.

Note: God is not only justified in the sufferings of His people, but He will be justified in the eternal damnation of the wicked.

Concl: Thus, Paul's word to the Thessalonian church is, "And to you who are troubled rest with us . . ." (v. 7). It is from an old Greek word which means to loosen, to relax, to give up the struggling, and to be calm. Transliterated the word is anesin.

How do we have peace in connection with our trials?

- 1) By knowing that God has a purpose for them as far as we are concerned.
- 2) By understanding that there is a day of judgment coming when God will deal with all of the injustices of life.

A DOUBLE GLORY
2 Thess. 1:11, 12

Intro: There can be no doubt for anyone who reads Paul's epistles but that he was preeminently a man of prayer. He was a man of the Word, but he was also a man of prayer.

2 Thessalonians 1 has prayer as its foundation, from start to finish. Paul began with thanksgiving; he ended with intercession. And the intercession was based upon that which caused his thanksgiving.

Tonight we want to consider his prayer at the end of the chapter.

There are three things to notice in these two verses:

- 1) Paul's perseverance in praying (v. 11a).
- 2) Paul's petitions (v. 11b).
- 3) Paul's purpose (v. 12).

I. PAUL'S PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER (2 Th. 1:11a).

It is always difficult to be faithful in prayer, especially if we cannot see what the Lord is doing in people's lives. Often what we can see is not encouraging, and that often makes us wonder if we are spending our time in the best possible way.

But it all comes down to the question: What does the Lord want us to do? Faithfulness in prayer is not an option for us. We are not to pray only when we can see the results. But we are to pray faithfully.

The problem often has to do with our petitions, and this may be one of the reasons that the petitions are given so often in Scripture. When we know that we are praying according to the will of God, we can be assured that our prayers are not wasted, and so we will persevere.

This is why he could say, "Wherefore also we pray always for you." It was the destiny of those Thessalonian believers that he had in mind.

II. PAUL'S PETITIONS (2 Th. 1:11b).

There are two petitions.

A. "That our God would count you worthy of this calling."

The second petition has two parts, but it is one petition.

B. (1) "And fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness,

(2) "And fulfil . . . the work of faith with power."

The first petition: What is "this calling"?

It is the call of God unto salvation. It was the out-working of their election by God, mentioned in 1 Th. 1:4.

But in what sense could they, or can we, be "worthy" of such a calling? Does it mean that after we are saved we prove ourselves to be worthy of the salvation that God has given us?

Obviously not! We are saved by grace.

Then what does it mean?

It means that "in that day" (v. 10b) the Lord will judge that our lives have been lived in harmony with the call that we have received--thinking particularly of the ultimate purpose of that call: our glorification into the likeness of Christ.

The second petition: This has to do with the way in which the first petition was going to be realized.

The first part of this second petition has to do with what GOD would do in them by His will. Cf. Phil. 2:12, 13.

Notice that our Lord's work in us is according to His "goodness." We may sometimes feel that it is otherwise, but it is always consistent with Romans 8:28. (Quote.)

So it means that God must work in them if such is to be the case.

"The work of faith with power" -- cf. v. 3.

So in the first part of this second petition the emphasis is on the nature of what God does; the second part has to do with the effect that it has on our lives.

Paul was always praying about this.

III. PAUL'S PURPOSE IN PRAYING (2 Th. 1:12).

Paul was thinking of what it would mean, first, to our Lord Jesus Christ; secondly, of what it would mean to us, and how it would be accomplished. In other words, he was concerned with A DOUBLE GLORY.

A. The first glory (and this always has to come first): the ultimate glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what Paul expressed in Eph. 1 as the purpose of our salvation. See vv. 6, 12, 14.

Notice: "in you." It cannot be by you unless it is "in you."

- B. The second glory: "and ye in him." Notice again--"in him."

This is the culmination of our salvation--our glory. This is guaranteed by the death and resurrection of our Saviour, but nevertheless it was a matter which Paul prayed about, and which he worked for.

Think of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and all that is bound up in the glory of that Name.

- C. How accomplished?

"According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is a work that is beyond us. We could never accomplish such a destiny. It is the work of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a work of grace, His enabling power given when we so often fail.

This is why Paul prayed.

Concl: What will be the effect upon any believer when God is answering such a prayer for him?

- 1) First, he will learn what is the basis of His salvation: the call of God, not his own choice of God.
- 2) Second, he will get concerned about what God intends that he ultimately be: His glorification.
- 3) Third, he will become increasingly concerned about the will of God, wanting in all things that God's purposes might be accomplished.
- 4) Fourth, he will want to trust the Lord more in all of the details of his life.
- 5) Fifth, he will realize that he is daily dependent upon fresh supplies of the grace of God, that it is only through God's grace that he can ever be what he ultimately must be.
- 6) Sixth, he will be so thankful for everyone who prays like this for him.

Who else do you think was praying for the Thessalonians? Possibly Silas. Possibly Timothy. Possibly the church at Antioch. Who know for sure? How many people do you know who are Christians who may not be prayed for by any other Christian? How many pastors pray regularly for their people--and pray like this when they pray? What a tremendous task we have!

ARE WE IN THE DAY OF THE LORD?
2 Thess. 2:1-12

Intro: How quickly false teaching will arise within a church!
It did not take long for it to appear in Thessalonica,
and it had to do with the coming of the Lord.

Teaching does not always eliminate the effect that false teaching can have. See verse 5. We see here, as elsewhere in Scripture, the importance of repetition.

Peter certainly gives us an example of this in his Second Epistle.

See also Phil. 3:1.

The Lord even sent the Holy Spirit, Whom He said would "bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

Tonight we observe the Lord's Supper which is a feast of remembrance: Twice the Lord said, "This do in remembrance of me." Cf. 1 Cor. 11:24, 25.

This is why it is important for us to read, and to re-read, the Bible.

One of the important words in the book of Deuteronomy is the word, "remember." The purpose of the passover was in order that the people would not forget what the Lord had done for them.

The textual problem in verse 2: "the day of Christ" should read, the day of the Lord.

This is an OT expression. An examination of the passages in the OT where it is used indicate that sometimes it is a time of great trouble; in other passages it is spoken of as a time of great blessing. Obviously both have to be true. And so it seems that "the day of the Lord" is a still future period of time during which there will be trouble such as the world has not yet seen, and yet blessing that will also surpass any blessing that has ever come upon the world. This will be the time of Great Tribulation and the Millennial reign of Christ on the earth.

But to turn more specifically to our text, note, first of all,

I. THE SOURCE OF THE FALSE TEACHING (2 Thess. 2:1, 2).

Once error gets started, it grows and grows.

"By spirit" seems to refer to a special revelation from the the Holy Spirit. "By word" means that some were saying that this is what Paul said. "By letter" may indicate that this is what Paul taught in his First Epistle, or it could refer to some other letter that the church had received, presuming to have been from Paul.

None of it was true, i.e., that they were already in the Day of the Lord, and Paul exhorted them "by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him" (v. 1).

II. THE REASONS BEHIND PAUL'S TEACHING.

There are three things which will introduce the Day of the Lord, none of which had occurred in Paul's day.

A. Verse 3: "There shall come a falling away first."

This is an apostacy. The word is used in Acts 21:21 where it is translated "to forsake."

The noun is used in Acts 20:30 where it is translated, "to draw away."

It is sometimes spoken of as something which tears a person away!

Cf. 2 Tim. 4:3, 4.

Are we seeing this with respect to the doctrines of grace? No one can say for sure, but the possibility is there.

B. Verse 3 again: "And that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."

In verse 8 he is called, "that Wicked" One.

In verse 9 he is described as "him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with . . ." (vv. 9, 10).

Notice also verse 4.

This fourth verse seems to indicate that this person shall be the master Antichrist. He is not worshipped, you will see as, as an imposter, but "as God"! Clearly such a person has not come because His end is to be that "the Lord shall consume" him "with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (v. 8).

C. Verse 7. (Read.)

This verse has been interpreted in many ways. The word "letteth" means to hinder, to restrain. It speaks of some person who is now present, who hinders sin now, but who eventually will "be taken out of the way."

Who is he? Linking verse 7 with verse 8 seems to indicate that he is restraining sin. Who is he?

Who restrained sin in Job's day?

Cf. Gen. 6:3.

Obviously God restrains sin. Sin is running its course, and is yet to see its greatest manifestation in the earth. That can only be when the restraining work of God is removed.

Since in Gen. 6:3 this is attributed to the Holy Spirit many feel that this refers to the removal of the Holy Spirit. This would not mean the total absence of the Holy Spirit, but the cessation of His restraining work.

III. EVANGELISM IN "THE DAY OF THE LORD."

We know from other passages that some people will be saved during "the day of the Lord. E.g., cf. the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

But it will also be a time a great apostacy from the truth, and of judgment. Many feel that this passage teaches that, if a person has heard the Gospel and rejected it before this time, they will only be plunged deeper and deeper into unbelief when this time comes. See verses 10-12.

Concl: What outstanding lessons can we learn from this passage?

Let me mention three:

- 1) This will be "the day of the Lord." How strange when it appears to be the day of the man of sin! But it is "the day of the Lord" because God will be in control, sovereignly working out His purposes of judgment in the earth.
- 2) Be on your guard against false teaching. Continually review the Word of God. Ask God to teach you by His Holy Spirit, and then continually remind yourself of the things that you have learned.
- 3) Warn people of what a solemn thing it is to hear the Gospel. We are so inclined to think that we can pick and choose the time that we will deal with God. This passage teaches otherwise.

ARE WE IN THE DAY OF THE LORD? No! But it is coming after we are with the Lord.

STANDING FIRM IN THE LAST DAYS
2 Thess. 2:13-17

Intro: Our text begins with a contrast from what Paul had been teaching about the last days--really a contrast with vv. 2, 3 of this chapter. As we will see in v. 17, Paul's exhortation was for them to "stand fast," or to stand firm, and to "hold" to the traditions which they had been taught. In other words, as we get closer to the final events of the world's history, things will deteriorate rapidly regarding the truth of God and the people of God. But, though the work of God will be under attack and threatened, yet it will not be overthrown. And Paul tells us in these verses, why.

Paul is not actually teaching the doctrine of salvation, but he gave the Thessalonians here what is perhaps the briefest and yet most complete statement of salvation that we have any place in the NT. The whole story is here. And we need to note every detail carefully.

There are three parts to the text:

- 1) Thanksgiving in vv. 13, 14.
- 2) Exhortation in v. 15.
- 3) Intercession in vv. 16, 17.

But let me deal with them in connection with the exhortation to "stand fast." The three sections then are these:

- I. WHO WILL STAND FAST?
- II. THE EXHORTATION TO STAND FAST.
- III. GOD'S WORK FOR OUR STANDING.

The verse divisions are the same as those given above.

I. WHO WILL STAND FAST? (2 Thess. 2:13, 14).

Paul announced here that he had a debt to God which he needed to pay. It was a debt which could only be paid with thanksgiving--and this is what he was doing.

Paul fell back upon the great doctrine of election for his own comfort, for the comfort of the Thessalonian believers, and for the praise of God. This is why the forces of evil will never be able to eradicate the work of God and the people of God from the earth.

Notice the great doctrines that are here:

- A. Election unto salvation--a personal election.
- B. Sanctification of the Spirit.
- C. Belief of the truth, or faith.
- D. The divine calling through the preaching of the Gospel.

E. The goal of salvation: "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Note: Paul did not say, "Now regarding your salvation, God does His part, and you do your part. So I want to thank God for what He has done, and I want to thank you for your part." No, he gave God the glory for it all, and said that he was obligated to give God His rightful due.

In eternity past God ordained that a work would be done in the hearts of His chosen ones for all eternity to come--a work which cannot fail. That was Paul's assurance that there would be those who would stand.

Incidentally, Paul used a different word in verse 13 for election from what he usually used. It means to take for one's self, to choose, to prefer before others.

But now notice another interesting thing about the rest of this passage.

Many scornfully reject the doctrine of election by saying that, if such a doctrine is true, then it makes no difference what we do--whether we preach the Gospel or not, whether we teach or not, whether we pray or not.

Paul followed this assuring word with two things which should answer every skeptic:

- 1) He exhorted the elect.
 - 2) He told them how he was praying for them as the elect.
- Remember: No doctrine can be true which sets aside any part of Scripture. The doctrine of election does not eliminate anything from the Word of God.

II. THE EXHORTATION (2 Thess. 2:15).

It is twofold:

- A. "Stand fast." Cf. 1 Th. 3:8.
- B. "Hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle."

The first means to stay in your place. It means, "Do not give up." They were not to be discouraged. They were not to stop doing what they had been doing. The opposition did not mean that they were wrong; it only meant that they were in enemy territory.

The second means that they were not to let anyone take the truth away from them. They were to keep a firm grasp upon

the Word. It was a sacred trust committed to them. The truth is called "traditions" because it was handed down to them--like a baton in a race (a relay race).

Paul used the word in 1 Cor. 11:23 when he was talking about the Lord's Supper:

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you . . .

In those days when it was not all written, the truth was communicated both orally and in written form. That which gave it authority was the one from whom the truth was received.

But they were not to give up the battle, and they were not to give up the truth. Paul teaches us that the elect need to be exhorted.

But there is one more point:

III. A PRAYER FOR THE ELECT (2 Th. 2:16, 17).

Verse 16 tells us what the members of the Godhead have already done for us with respect to the assurance of our salvation. The Father and the Son have assured us of their love, and have encouraged us with "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace."

We are not worried about the final outcome. What bothers us is what is going to happen during the next twenty-four hours, or the next week, or the next month!

And so we have the prayer in v. 17. Two things Paul asked:

A. "Comfort your hearts."

Notice: This is something that Paul had asked the Lord Jesus Christ and God, our Father, to do for the saints in Thessalonica, not something that they were to do for themselves.

It involves the application of truth which we know for the comfort of our hearts--an inner comfort which affects our outward behavior and appearance.

B. "And stablish you in every good word and work."

This really is equal to standing fast (see v. 15). It means, to be faithful, to strengthen, to keep a person going.

It takes the Lord to do this for us. We cannot do it for ourselves.

Concl: Do you see what the issues are?

There are dreadful days ahead. They are enough to make even the elect falter and fail. Their only hope is in the Lord and what the Lord can do for them. Therefore, they need three

— things (according to this passage:

- 1) They need to understand the doctrine of salvation.
- 2) They need to be exhorted.
- 3) They need prayer.

This is the ministry that we have for each other, and we need to give ourselves more and more to teaching,
to exhortation, and
to prayer.

PRAYER AND THE WORK OF GOD
2 Thess. 3:1-5

Intro: The word translated "finally" does not always mean that the Apostle was concluding. He used it in Phil. 3:1 when he was only half through his letter. It is an expression which means that the Apostle was moving on to something else, something of special importance to which he was calling attention.

It is translated "furthermore" in 1 Thess. 4:1.

It even seems to be a word which points to practical matters.

Paul had been writing about prophetic truth and about the end of things here on the earth. "Finally" is like saying, "Now what are you in Thessalonica to be doing since these things are true.

His main answer is that they were to pray!

- 1) Vv. 1, 2 tell how he wanted them to pray for the work, and for him (and his co-workers).
- 2) V. 3 give the main encouragement to pray, followed by v. 4 which is also encouragement.
- 3) V. 5 indicates how Paul would be praying for them.

So when we think of the times in which we live, we need to realize that prayer must have priority. The work of the Lord needs to be characterized by prayer.

Let us note what Paul had to say.

I. HOW THE PEOPLE WERE TO PRAY (2 Thess. 3:1, 2).

By the way, there are two parts to each of the three divisions which I have pointed out in these five verses.

Let me ask two questions:

- 1) Do you really feel that it is important for you to pray?
- 2) Do you believe that an Apostle like Paul needed the prayers of the Thessalonians?

Let me ask you a question that is even more amazing than that: Do you think that the Lord Jesus needed the prayers of Peter, James, and John? Cf. Matt. 26:38, 40.

Cf. 1 Thess. 5:25.

The answer to all of those questions should be in the affirmative -- YES!

But how should we pray? This is where Paul has helped us.

A. For the ministry of the Word (v. 1).

This is the main part of the work of God--the ministry of the Word.

But what should we pray for concerning the Word?

Two requests:

1. "That the word of the Lord may have (free) course."

"Have free course" is the translation of the Greek verb, to run.

Think of what had happened in Thessalonica. We are inclined to feel that such a thing was not possible. The work of God is often a plodding work. We see few results. Perhaps it is because we do not ask that the Word be spread rapidly. Apparently it does not have to move slowly--and it certainly did not in the early Church. It does not mean that there will not be opposition (or we would not have Paul's second request), but it does mean that there will be fruit, quick fruit, fruit that remains!

Think of what a powerful Word we have, and what a mighty instrument it is in the hand of God when He sees fit to work with it.

The second part of that one request: "and be glorified."

What does it mean when God is glorified? Or what will it mean when we are glorified?

To be glorified means that a thing is seen the way it really is!

Cf. what John wrote in John 1:14. While others were arguing about our Lord's background, or about His lack of training, there were others like John who were permitted to see the Lord as He really was!

How many there are who read the Word who have never seen the glory of the Word, who have never recognized that it is indeed the Word of God!

Cf. 1 Thess. 2:13.

2. "That we may be delivered . . ." (v. 2).

This is the word that Paul used in 1 Thess. 1:10. Paul also used it of our Lord in Rom. 11:26, calling Him, "the Deliverer."

Vine says that the dominant idea in this verse is that of rescuing someone. The request indicated that Paul expected that there would be opposition, and that only the Lord could deliver him.

He also knew who would oppose him. They would be:

- 1) "Unreasonable . . . men" -- a word which literally means a person who is out of place, who says and does things which are inappropriate. He is wrong, and will not stop short of doing something wicked, if it is to his advantage. He may be in the church, but his conduct shows that he knows nothing about how a child of God should behave.
- 2) "Wicked men" -- men who are actively evil, and who always seek to get a following behind them. They are not willing to live-and-let-live, but they want to get rid of those with whom they disagree.

Why are they like this?

Not just because they do not have "faith," but because they do not have THE FAITH--which is an expression for the truth of the Word of God. They may know a lot of facts, but they do not understand it.

Paul said that he expected such opposition, and he needed their support in prayer.

Next . . .

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAY (2 Thess. 3:3, 4).

The one who prays, or who sets himself to pray, also has a battle on his hands. And the Lord is the only One who can make us and keep us true to our calling.

Men may oppose, and men may at times seem to be the victors. "But the Lord is faithful." He will not forsake us. He will hear our prayers. He knows our weaknesses and our fears, and He is more than sufficient for all of the difficulties that stand in the way of the preaching of the Gospel.

Notice the progression that Paul has given us in vv. 3, 4.

- 1) The Lord does two things for us, according to v. 3.
- 2) Then he enables us to do what we ought to do (v. 4).

A. What He does for us (v. 3).

1. He establishes us. This was a part of Paul's prayer in 2:17. It means to strengthen, to make a person stand, to be faithful. The Lord is faithful, and He will make us faithful.

2. He keeps us from evil.

Lit. this is, He will keep you from THE evil, or from the Evil One.

— Not only does the Lord deliver us, but He also keeps a lot of things from ever happening, which are designed against us.

B. What He enables us to do (v. 4).

Notice where Paul's confidence was: "in the Lord," not in the people.

His confidence was that they were then doing, and would continue to do, what Paul had by the authority of the Holy Spirit had commanded them to do!

One of those commands was, "Finally, brethren, pray for us." Let us ask people to pray for us, but then let us pray that they will pray, and continue to pray, for us. That is what Paul did.

We need each other's prayers, but our confidence must not be in each other.

— Lastly,

III. HOW PAUL PRAYED FOR THE PEOPLE (2 Thess. 3:5).

Again we have two parts, two requests.

Notice the expression, "direct your hearts."

Cf. 1 Th. 3:11. "Direct" is a word calling for two things:

- 1) Guidance.
- 2) The removal of hindrances that stand in the way.

The battle is liable to produce two undesirable results in our "hearts" (note this word):

- 1) Bitterness.
- 2) Discouragement.

So to be directed into the love of God meant not only to understand it more fully, but to manifest it continually.

— "The patient waiting for Christ" probably should be translated into the patience of Christ. Paul was not here speaking of His coming, but of the manner in which He lit. remained under the terrible task the Father had sent Him to accomplish.

It is in our "hearts" that we need this help, and it is given

in answer to prayer!

Concl: Do you see how needy we all are, even the Apostle Paul?
We would all fail if we were to stand in our own strength.

But do you also see how very important it is that we pray--and that we pray aright?

We cannot expect to serve the Lord without opposition, but we must expect to serve Him with blessing and with victory. God gets the greater glory, not by withholding all trouble, but by giving us victory in spite of the trouble that we do face.

May God enable us to pray, and to be faithful in our praying.

Disorderly Christians
2 Thess. 3:6-18

Intro: In the best churches there are those with great spiritual needs. Such was the case with the church in Thessalonica
- The need had to do with those who were "disorderly."

The word is a military term, and it means a person who is out-of-step with the others who are in the church. Such a person is undisciplined, unruly, because he refuses to be submissive to the Word of God.

One reason that Paul was so concerned about this was that one area of disobedience in a believer's life is always followed by others. The longer this was permitted to remain, the bigger it would get. And, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1 Cor. 5:6b).

So, for the believers personally and for the church corporately, Paul had much to move him to write as he did. Therefore, the concluding part of this Epistle had to do with church discipline.

But how did the Apostle approach his subject?

There are five outstanding things to be seen in these verses and they all are important for us to know in maintaining the purity of the church.

I. The Apostle's Standard of Conduct (2 Thess. 3:6).

See also 2:15. It has reference to the Word of God!

Conduct that deviates from the Word of God is the source of trouble both for the individual Christian and for the Church.

II. The Apostle's Authority (2 Thess. 3:6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15).

It is important to see that the Apostle Paul did not ask them to submit this to a vote of the church. Nor did he ask them to appeal, or to plead, with the guilty person. But he wrote with apostolic authority. The whole passage is characterized by this.

The church today is weak on this point, and consequently it is continually being weakened more and more. We need to deal with each other as being under the authority of God Himself and of the Lord Jesus Christ. See esp. v. 12a.

III. The Apostle's Example (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Paul actually worked himself, even though he had the authority ("power" in v. 9) to do otherwise.

Sometimes we do not do the things that we have the right to do in order that we may live and work to a greater advantage. Cf. 1 Thess. 2:6. This is the way that Paul had established the work there, and he had continued with them on the same basis.

Good examples make us a more powerful force in our teaching.

IV. The Apostle's Hope.

Note what he told them to do in v. 6, and then in vv. 14, 15.

What is the object of church discipline? It is the restoration of brethren who are walking disorderly. This might seem hard, but it is that which the Holy Spirit uses. It is not for us to try to find a better way. This is the best way because it is God's way!

How do we know when a problem has been solved?

The problem is solved when the brother (or sister) repents and brings his life into conformity with the Word of God! Paul was always hopeful that this would be the result, and it usually was!

V. The Apostle's Encouragement for the Church.

See, first of all, v. 13. The church needed encouragement to continue on in obedience to the Lord, and not to turn aside because of having to deal with trouble in the lives of those who were disobedient.

Secondly, in v. 17, the very fact that he would take the time and trouble to write to them. Do we realize what an encouragement it can be to others when we write to them?

Thirdly, the Apostle Paul's prayers. See vv. 16 and 18. Only God could actually change the situation in Thessalonica. That is always the case. Therefore, we need to pray before we take action, while we are acting, and when the work, all that we can do, is done! Pray, pray, pray! It is only through prayer and the Word that the work of God can and will remain strong.

Concl: Note the suggestion in v. 17. Cf. 2:1, 2. Paul knew that the Devil was always seeking to gain an entrance into the churches, and that he would do it by having someone write to the church, posing as Paul, with the desire of establishing another authority. This is what happens even today when we set the authority of any man above the Word of God.