

The Pulpit and the Pews

(2 Thessalonians 3:1-5)

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Introduction

A sad reality of church life is often the tension that exists between church leadership and the congregation.

Sometimes, pastors and elders and deacons are difficult people who lack love for the flock that God has entrusted to them

Sometimes, the people are a difficult flock that make it hard for the shepherds called to lead them.

Yet neither example is God's plan for the church.

The church is called to faith in Christ.

They are joined in local gatherings and led by men that God sends to them.

And God's intention is for the shepherd and sheep relationship to be one of mutual trust and respect and help.

The shepherds lead the flock and the people follow, and the purpose of their relationship is to grow in their faith while taking the truth of the gospel into the world.

Unfortunately, churches like that are not always the norm.

Stories of fights between pastors and churches are all too common, but why is that?

Well for starters, not all men in church leadership positions are qualified to be there.

Worse yet, some leaders aren't even saved.

But it also need to said that that not everyone in the church is saved either.

So when you factor in those realities, it is easy to understand conflicts.

But even when church leaders are saved and qualified and even when the members of the church are saved, there can even be tension among the sheep and the shepherd..

However, that should not be the case at all since both shepherds and sheep serve the same Lord.

Tonight, in 2 Thessalonians 3, we are going to hear a shepherd speak to his sheep in the right way.

We are going to see the intimate and close relationship that church leaders and church members should have.

As we come to chapter 3 of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonian church, we begin to hear Paul's heart for this church but also their heart for him.

Paul came into this town as the next stop on his missionary journey.

He probably didn't have his hopes up too high since Thessalonica was not the greatest of cities.

There was crime and pornography everywhere.

There was false worship there.

Yet, Paul was faithful in his mission and he went into the synagogue there and preached Christ as Messiah to the Jews and Greeks gathered in it.

And probably much to his surprise, some of the people saw his words as the word of God.

They came out of Judaism.

They repented of their sins, and they trusted in Christ alone as their hope of salvation.

And God gave birth to a church there.

However, the leaders of the synagogue didn't like losing members to this new thing called Christianity, so they ran Paul out of town.

Now Paul could have just said "Forget it. I am not going back to Thessalonica."

However, his heart was with this church.

He sent Timothy to check on them.

He wrote them a letter bragging on their love and work and witness.

He gave them instruction.

He wrote them a second letter in hopes of calming their fears by correcting false teaching.

This is a man who loved the church at Thessalonica...

And I think it is safe to say that the people in Thessalonica loved him.

They didn't upset with his correction.

They welcomed it.

He didn't get upset with their immaturity.

He showed patience.

And now as we get to the end of his second letter to them, we come to a section that demonstrates how a pastor and his flock have a mutual love and respect for one another..

In fact, we see the fruit of that in verse 1-5 of chapter 3..

I entitled this, "Healthy Church Living," and that is the outcome when you combine biblical church leadership and biblical church membership..

So what do healthy church members and church leaders do?

Well, we are going to see 4 actions of a healthy church.

Let's begin in verses 1 and 2 with what we can call..

I. A Healthy Church Prays for Her Leadership
(1-2)

If someone comes to see me and is really battling a bad relationship with someone else, one of the first counsels I give to them is to start praying for that person.

I don't care who it is.

It may be an estranged parent or child or spouse or friend.

It doesn't matter.

Prayer for others, if done regularly and sincerely, will soften your hearts to that person.

And why is that?

Because prayer is so intimate.

It is you talking to the Lord about this person.

Prayer for someone else connects you to them in the closest of ways.

Paul understood that.

Paul prayed regularly for the churches he served.

Paul had prayed for the Thessalonians on numerous occasions..

He had prayed that their faith and love would grow.

He had prayed for their testimony to spread..

But now in verse 1 of 2 Thess 3, Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray for him.

Look at verse 1..

Finally, brethren, pray for us

Now that may seem like an odd request.

Paul is the spiritual giant.

The Thessalonians are spiritual babies.

Yet Paul covets their prayers because he knows that ministry cannot be done in his own power and ingenuity.

Paul was gifted and courageous, but he was nothing without the Lord's help.

And how did he get the Lord's help?

Through the prayers of the people that Paul ministered too..

This also shows his humility.

Paul knows that he is nothing.

He knows that all his ministry is simply a credit to God working through him.

Now what does Paul want the people to pray?

Two things..

The first prayer request is found in verse 1..

1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will [a]spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you;

Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray for the messages that Paul preached...

Paul had been visited by Christ.

He had been taught by Christ.

He also had the words of the disciples that they had been given by Christ.

And he took all that information and preached it wherever the Lord sent him.

The primary message.

The primary word he preached was Jesus as the Jewish Messiah.

Paul had been called to take the gospel, the good news that Messiah had come, to the world..

And his hope was that his message would be heard far and wide, not so that Paul would become famous but so that the gospel would become famous.

So he asks his church to pray for him in that regard.

Look, this should be a constant prayer of the saints.

We want the gospel to spread so that people can be saved.

It has nothing to do with popularity or fame or recognition.

The hope of the pastor is that the word of God would expand, and the prayers of the people is that God would make that happen.

But Paul doesn't stop there.

He also asks the Thessalonians to pray for the spread of the word but also for the glorification of the Word..

What does that mean?

Well, the Thessalonians were an example of what it means to glorify the word of the Lord..

Listen to Paul's first letter to them..

1 Thessaloninas 2:13.

13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

If you want to pray for my preaching, pray that people would hear it and see it as the word of God.

I have desire for my stories to be remembered.

I have no desire for my illustrations or introductions or conclusions to be remembered.

Ultimately, I want the word of God to be remembered and obeyed and honored in the lives of the people who hear it.

My prayer for my own preaching is that Christ is known and not Bud Moss.

I have no desire for glory, but I have a strong desire for the Word to be glorified because people who honor it, honor the Lord who inspired it.

This is also the desire of Paul.

His words are worthless but the word that he preaches is invaluable.

And the Thessalonians are living proof that the word of God is living and active and does not return void.

So Paul asks them to pray that his preaching would have the same effect that it did when he preached it to them..

But that is not the only prayer that Paul coverts from the Thessalonians.

He also asks for them to pray for his protection..

Look at verse 2..

Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will [a]spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 2 and that we will be rescued from [b]perverse and evil men; for not all have [c]faith.

Paul knew firsthand what it was like to face opposition to his message.

In fact, Paul is writing the Thessalonians instead of fellowshiping with them because he had been chased out of town by perverse and evil Jews.

The issue is not Paul's desire to avoid pain and death.

In fact, Paul knows that it is better to depart to be with Christ, but he also knows that his departure would slow the spread of the gospel.

So he asks the church to pray for his rescue from evil men.

Look, I don't understand the opposition that Paul faced on a daily basis, but I can assure you that evil men still try to stop the spread of the word.

Today, that persecution often comes from within the church as Christians oppose pastors and church leaders.

In fact, Paul adds that these evil men lack faith.

In other words, unbelievers are his greatest enemies, and that is still true in some churches where unbelieving wolves roam among the sheep.

The pastor is always in need of prayers for his protection from the enemy.

And needless to say, sheep that love their shepherd are always praying for him..

But then in verse 3, the tables turn and we see Paul's love for his people...

Let's call this..

II. A Healthy Pastor Points His Flock to the Lord **(3)**

In the same way that the people are called to help their pastor, the pastor is called to help his people..

Look at verse 3..

3 But the Lord is faithful, [d]and He will strengthen and protect you [e]from the evil one.

Though Paul cannot be there with the Thessalonians to protect them from false teaching and false teachers, he can assure them of the Lord's protection of them.

And look, this is what a healthy pastor does.

He points his people to the Lord.

My job is not to make you grow your trust in me.

My job is to cause your trust in the Lord to grow.

So many pastors today seem to want everything in the church to flow through them.

Look, this isn't my church.

It is the Lord's church, and I have no desire to take it from him.

My job is to serve the church and to lead his people to trust more fully in Him.

The Thessalonians were disturbed by the false teaching that has come to them, but the solution that that anxiety was not found in a man.

The solution to their anxiety was found in the truth that God had given to Paul about the order of end times events..

And the solutions was also found in trusting the Lord to care for them.

Churches that depend upon men often collapse when men leave.

Churches that depend upon the Lord will stand even the toughest times.

The Thessalonians didn't need Paul to come rescue them.

They needed truth and they needed to trust in the Lord.

Healthy pastors point their people to the Lord and not to themselves..

A third characteristic of a healthy shepherd and sheep is this..

III. A Healthy Pastor Pushes His Flock to Obedience (4)

Look at verse 4.

4 We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.

Paul knew that the Thessalonians were an obedient group of people.

He had heard of their love for one another.

He had heard of their work for the gospel.

He had heard of their perseverance in the truth.

And let me tell you something..

Nothing thrills the heart of a pastor more than hearing that his people are living in obedience..

In fact, John says in his 3rd letter that the greatest joy in his life is to hear that his children are walking in the church.

And John isn't talking about physical children there, he is talking about his spiritual children..

People that he has disciplined and and taught and cared for.

This is the heart of the healthy pastor.

His greatest joy is the obedience of his people.

Paul can identify with John.

But if you are a parent, you also understand the joy of seeing your children making right choices and obeying you.

In fact, nothing probably grieves your heart more than seeing the disobedience of your children..

We all want to see those closet to us obey and do the right thing.

Paul had the same desire for the Thessalonians.

He wanted them to remain obedient to the Lord.

And notice where his confidence for their continued obedience came from?

4 We have confidence in the Lord concerning you

This is such a crucial truth to understand.

Paul couldn't make anyone do anything.

He couldn't force the Thessalonians to do the right thing.

He couldn't make them obey.

He simply put his trust in the Lord to move their hearts to obedience.

Look, we all struggle with this as believers.

God has saved us and done amazing things in our lives, and we so want other people to experience the same blessings.

So we call them to obey and be blessed.

Yet, we find frustration in the lack of obedience that we see in others.

Sometimes, we want to make them do the right thing but we can't.

Instead, we have trust the Lord to move them to obedience.

We have to ask the Lord to create an obedient heart in them.

Look, are there times that I get frustrated with the lack of obedience that I see in people who should know and do better?

Absolutely yes!

Am I called to make them obey?

Absolutely not!

My confidence in the Lord.

HE will convict.

He will correct.

And he will bring obedience if they belong to Him.

However, that being said.

Part of my responsibility is to call people to obedience..

Part of preaching should always contain exhortations to obey what we find in Scripture.

Healthy preachers are concerned with the obedience of their people.

Because obedient people are blessed while the disobedient always find trouble.

Paul wants the Thessalonians to remain obedient so that they will remain blessed.

A fourth and final characteristic of healthy pastors and healthy people is found in verse 4..

IV. A Healthy Pastor Prays for His People (5)

Let's read verse 5..

5 May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.

This may be the simplest of pastoral prayers but it is one of the most important that Paul or any pastor could pray.

First, Paul asks the Lord to direct the hearts of the Thessalonians to love Him.

Seems simple enough but when we consider all the things that we can and do love more than the Lord, this is a necessary and frequent prayer for the church.

Everything in this world competes for our love.

Whether it be a job, a hobby, a pastime.

Whether it be money or power or fame.

Or even it is a good thing like family or friends, everything competes for our love and devotion and time.

Yet, nothing should top of love of the Lord.

Nothing should top our devotion to him.

So Paul prays for the Lord to direct the hearts of the Thessalonians to love Him..

But he also asks the Lord to direct the hearts of the Thessalonians into the steadfastness of Christ.

Steadfastness is another word for patience.

In other words, Paul prays for the Thessalonians to grow in the patience of Christ.

What does that mean?

Well, the Thessalonians were a persecuted group.

Ever since Paul preached to them and they left the synagogue, the Jews had targeted them.

They had their pastor and his friends run out of town.

They had likely sent a phony letter or messenger to them.

This church was enduring some serious affliction, so Paul prays that God would direct their hearts into the patience of Christ.

They needed patient endurance.

They needed to follow the model of their Savior who endured evil men to the very end.

Look, we may not be persecuted like the Thessalonians today but we certainly need the patience of Christ in a world opposed to the gospel.

A church that loves God and has the patience of Christ can accomplish much in the world.

And a healthy pastor prays that his people would have and do both.

Conclusion

What can we take with us from this passage tonight?

#1 - The man in the pulpit needs prayer.

Please pray for me church.

Pray that I would study the word effectively and preach it accurately.

Pray that the word would be listened to and honored by those who hear it.

Pray that the message would leave out these doors and go into the world.

Pray that I would be protected spiritually from temptation and from evil people seeking to do evil things.

#2 - The people in the pews need prayer.

I should pray for the Lord to protect you.

I should pray for the the Lord to help you obey.

I should pray for the Lord to fill with you love for him and patience like Christ's.

#3 - The pulpit and the pews are on the same team.

I grieve over disputes between sheep and shepherds when I see them.

Are there men in pulpits who are disqualified and need to go?

You bet.

Are there unrepentant sinners in the pews who stay in their sin and need to go?

You bet.

But by and large, the pastor and people are on the same team pursuing the same goals if each are truly saved.

Paul loved the Thessalonians even though they weren't perfect, and the Thessalonians loved Paul.

They were each praying for one another.

They were hoping for the best in one another.

And in all that, God was honored.

May that always be true of our church as well.

I want the best for yall, and I pray that yall want the best for me.

Let us pray.