



2 Thessalonians

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And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. 2 Thessalonians 3:4

Paul just said, "But the Lord is faithful." In agreement with that, he continues with, "And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you." Paul's confidence is not at all in the faithfulness of those in Thessalonica. Instead, it is a confidence for them which is grounded in the Lord. This is the same thing that he relays to others, such as the church in Philippi –

"...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:6

Paul understood the wretched state of the human heart, and its ability to not effectively work out anything but evil. However, when one is in Christ, there is the truth that Christ's power and purposes can be realized in us in a way which was previously not possible. This doesn't mean that saved believers are automatons which can rely on Christ doing everything for us, but that when we are willing to submit to Him, we are able to do what He expects of us. Our human will is not excluded from the process, and we can choose to work out evil even after coming to Christ. But if we desire to do as He wills, He will ensure that it is possible for us to do so.

Paul then states what that confidence in his hearers is – "both that you do and will do the things we command you." It is the same formula which is found throughout Paul's writings. God presents an offer; man receives the offer. It is a synergistic working of God's divine offer and assistance being coupled with man's human efforts.

This does not mean that man's works are credited for salvation. God has done all the work, but man must respond to the offer by exercising faith. Romans 3:27 excludes faith as being considered a work. After salvation, our proper walk in Christ follows this same pattern, but it

then involves human effort beyond faith. We must “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippines 2:12).

As far as the word “command.” It is a word which signifies a watchword or command that has full authorization because it has gone through the right and correct channels. Paul’s commission is specifically noted in Acts 9. He (and those with him) had the full authority of Christ Jesus to make such commands as authorized by the Lord. He will begin to give some such commands in just two verses.

Life application: As always, Paul notes that we must actively do something in order for God’s will to be realized in our lives. The Lord makes it possible for us to be pleasing to God, but we still must do in accord with that which the Lord makes possible. Obedience to the Lord’s will must be an active part of our lives, or we will not be pleasing to the Lord.

Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

2 Thessalonians 3:5

An implicit reference to the Trinity is stated here. “Now may the Lord direct your hearts” is a work which properly belongs to the Holy Spirit. “The Lord” here would be, in Paul’s mind, the Greek rendering of the divine Hebrew name of God.” In the Greek, it is a general word for God, but the order of the verse is showing us that he is thinking of the sacred name first, which he then breaks down into the Persons and workings of the Godhead.

“Into the love of God” gives the sense of, “So that you may love God.” This doesn’t mean that they didn’t yet love God, but Paul is petitioning that they will always be directed to love God. It is comparable to saying to a couple on their wedding, “May the power of love direct your heart into the love of one another.” They are already in love, but the appeal is that they will always be in love, and drawn into the love of one another. It is as if the love is a safe haven from all the cares and worries which could otherwise steal away the joy of being united. And to ensure that this love is strengthened so that it can be realized, he finishes with “and into the patience of Christ.”

Christ was able to face His trials patiently because his heart was fully directed to the love of God. But it is also true that His patience in those trials made it possible for Him to be directed into the love of God. The two work hand in hand to form a complete whole. In our trials, we need to be patient, understanding that God has a good end for us, even if the immediate moments are seemingly unbearable. And, in our trials we need to direct our hearts into the love of God so that we may be patient through the trials. Each is a part of the whole, and together they will keep us on the right path towards the good end which lies ahead for the people of God.

And these things are needed based on what he had said in the previous verse. He had just said, "And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you." By having our hearts directed into the love of God, and also by having the patience of Christ, we will certainly have the desire and the ability to do the things we are commanded to do. This is Paul's heartfelt prayer for those in Thessalonica (and thus us!).

Life application: Times of trial are certain to come, but if we are properly directed, and if we are determined to patiently endure them, then those trials will not destroy our faith. Instead, we will be able to maintain it through the trials. If we are lacking these things, we should pray for the Lord to direct us and establish us in them. He will graciously grant such a request, as He has done for the countless faithful who have gone before us.

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. 2 Thessalonians 3:6

In verse 4, Paul noted his confidence that the Thessalonians would do the things that were commanded them. He now gives such a command, specifically stating it as such. But, he again calls them "brethren." It is a command based on their place in Christ, and one which is intended to ensure harmony within that placement. To further bolster this, he then says, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is what made them "brethren" in the first place.

Because of their standing in Christ, and under the authority of that name which was given to Paul (and those with him), he issues his first of a series of commands and exhortations. This first command is "that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly." The word he uses is only found elsewhere in 2 Corinthians 8:20. It gives the sense of "taking precaution" against. In modern lingo, we might nod towards such a person and quietly say under our breath, "Watch out for that guy."

This is not a formal excommunication, but it is a strong warning to not get tangled up with such a person. Most churches of any size at all have one or two people like this. They are given instruction, and they refuse to apply it to their lives. Thus, they are disorderly. The word so translated is an adverb found twice, both in this chapter (see verse 11 for its second use). As an adjective, it is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 where it is translated as "unruly." It signifies someone who walks in an insubordinate manner towards the word of God, and is thus fruitless. He lacks proper discipline.

The reason he is this way is because his walk is "not according to the tradition which he received from us." The "tradition" Paul speaks of is an authoritative standard which is

expected to be passed on and adhered to. As it says, it is “from us.” It is that which is apostolic in nature. As it is, it ultimately receives its authority from Christ the Lord.

Today, with the Bible complete, there is no such tradition which is not found there. In other words, with the ending of the apostolic age, any other “traditions” are from men and not from God. They may be useful, but they do not carry the same authoritative stamp. Papal edicts, books of discipline, etc, can be amended. The word of God cannot. It is this word of God which carries the “traditions” which Paul speaks of here.

Life application: Churches often place high value on written codes which are extra-biblical, using them for the practical guidance of their gatherings. This is rather unfortunate, as has been seen among many long-standing denominations in recent years. One example is the Book of Discipline found in the Methodist church. It was given with guidelines concerning morality which were originally closely aligned with biblical standards. However, those standards have lately been changed, or are being evaluated for change, to allow all kinds of unbiblical perversion. Instead of going back to the source, meaning the Bible, they have altered the traditions which were man-given. This is error. Either the Bible is the rule and guide of our walk, or we have no proper source by which we will conduct ourselves in accord with God’s standards.