

God's Gospel Faithfulness

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[0 : 00] 2 Thessalonians chapter 3. And Kara will serve us this morning, and she will randomly pick any one of these microphones that she wishes.

This is 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, starting at verse number 1 and down through verse number 5. Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may be speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not all have faith.

But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God, and to the steadfastness of Christ. Good Father, thank you for gathering us here to worship together, to celebrate again all of the many good things that you have done for us in and through our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord Jesus, thank you for the death that you died that should have been my death. Thank you for your glorious resurrection and your wonderful, so needful intercession.

[1 : 32] Holy Spirit, thank you for granting us life and faith so that we could respond with repentance and belief. Father, as we turn our attention now to the preaching of your Holy Word, would you please, Holy Spirit, go before us.

In all of my weakness, would you please, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, show yourself strong. Would you deliver us from any sort of nonsense, any sort of foolishness that would be unhelpful or distracting, and would you give me all of the grace and the courage that I need to speak your word boldly and clearly.

Help us to understand the things that we see in your word together. Help us to believe and to obey them, and help us to trust you more as we leave this place of worship than we did when we came into this place.

Give us fresh eyes to see our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in all of his beauty. As we have sang together, turn our eyes upon Jesus.

We ask this for our good and for your glory. In the name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen. Moderation is difficult.

[3 : 01] It is hard to act with self-control when there is a plate of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies on the counter, isn't it?

I would not feel this sense of lack of self-control if they were oatmeal raisin cookies. But chocolate chip, freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, hard to act with self-control.

It is a ton of fun to push your sister or a young child on a swing. But do you know what can happen if you are a sibling who is pushing a young one?

Like imagine if you are pushing Kenzie, for example, on a swing. Do you know what the temptation is? To push higher and harder and faster. Do you know why?

Because moderation is hard. It's hard for us to act with self-control. My grandfather had a little desk toy like this.

[4 : 01] It's called Newton's Cradle. And it has these little steel balls on it. Maybe some of you have seen one of these. And it's very fascinating. If you pick up one of the steel balls and you swing it back and you let it go, what do you think will happen?

It is so close to what you're thinking, except for this. Get this. You do that with one ball and one ball will bounce off the other side. But if you pick up two and you pull up two and you let two swing, what will happen?

Two will swing from the other side. It is a remarkable thing that God has done with physics. You can do it with three. You can also do it with four, which really kind of messes with your brain a little bit,

right?

You pull up four of them. How is that happening? But four will bounce off the other side. Do you know what doesn't work? Five.

Do you know what happens if you try to do five with this guy? Your grandpa looks at you funny. My grandpa Peterson would look at you and probably have a cross eye for you. Maybe not, because maybe he liked me.

[5 : 12] I'm not sure. But he would say, what have you done here? What have you done? You can't do five. It works with four, but not five. But listen, moderation is hard when you're a kid.

Moderation is hard for adults as well. It's appropriate to work very hard to God's glory when we are at work. And yet, we can find ourselves as Christians wanting to do the right thing, but struggling with moderation at work.

Where we just give ourselves and pour ourselves into our work, which can be a good thing. But then we can find ourselves out of a healthy, we call it, work-life balance.

That's a conversation about moderation. You can swing this the other way. It doesn't just happen when we take too much.

You can swing the pendulum, if you will, the other way. For example, I think most of us know that too much sodium is not good in our diets.

[6 : 13] But if you take out all sodium out of your diet and you say, well, I'm just going all in. If sodium, if too much is bad for me, I'm going to take it all out. If you take out all of your sodium, that's also not healthy.

You will have muscle weakness. You can have muscle spasms. You'll probably get cramps in your leg muscles. We have a problem with moderation. Gaugeing the appropriate swing of this pendulum is hard.

One cookie, good. Ten cookies, not good. Swinging your sister on a swing, very good. Pushing your sister too high on the swing, not good.

We often go to extremes. Moderation can be difficult with doctrine too.

Perhaps you have noticed this in your interactions with Christians. We can swing to particular extremes with doctrines like eschatology, which we looked at a little bit in the last chapter.

[7 : 24] How will the world end? We can swing to one particular extreme or another with doctrinal positions like complementarity. We can swing from one position to another with things like dispensations or covenant theology and have a particular system that we enjoy and appreciate and value, and yet that system itself can become more important to us, either than people that we love and want to care for and disciple along in their faith, or it can be more important to us than even finding a healthy church where we can love and serve one another and say, what is the most important things for us?

Let's focus on the gospel, first of all. I left one out of this list. Perhaps you are familiar with the phrase cage stage Calvinist.

This happens when a person becomes familiar with the doctrines of grace, and now this is suddenly the only thing they want to talk about, and every conversation needs to somehow get back to the doctrines of grace and Calvinism.

And this is not particularly helpful either, because if these beautiful truths that we looked at last week don't settle deeply into our hearts, we can have an unhealthy fixation that can result in bad behavior.

For example, you may swing the pendulum in one direction and say, well, God's grace is so amazing that my behavior doesn't matter. I can do whatever I want because God's grace is amazing.

[9 : 03] Or you could swing the pendulum in another direction, another extreme, and you could say, well, God's grace is sovereign, and so therefore he's going to save whosoever he's going to save, so I don't need to be involved in evangelism anymore.

And that is also an unbiblical, incorrect extreme. Now, Paul, of course, never heard the term Calvinism, but he does seem to have our proclivity to swing this particular doctrinal pendulum to unhelpful precipices in mind.

Remember our context. Chapter 2, verse 13 and 14. This is our context coming into chapter 3. We ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters, loved by the Lord.

Because from the beginning, God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

He called you to this through our gospel. This seems to be the particular doctrinal position that Paul has in mind as he is approaching chapter 3.

[10:22] If we believe that God is sovereign over all things, including our salvation, then let's just wait around for Jesus to come back.

Why not? Paul says no. Verse number 15. Brothers and sisters, stand firm. Hold fast. Verse number 17.

He wants the Thessalonians and the Spirit desires for us to get after every good work and every good word. And Paul asks something else of the Thessalonians, and that is our text for today.

Chapter 3 and verse 1. In addition, brothers and sisters, pray for us. Pray for us.

Now you say, well, wait a minute. If God is in control, like you say he is, then God is going to do whatever God is going to do. Why should I pray?

[11:27] Let me ask you this question. If you really believe that God is in control, how could you not pray? I mean, if you really believe that and those truths about God's sovereignty over salvation have gone from your head down into your heart, how could you not pray to God?

Who else but God can ensure the success of gospel ministry? Who else but God can ensure the success of gospel ministry? Don't swing the pendulum too far, though.

Don't assume that the necessity of prayer means that the gospel is somehow failing. Notice Paul's first prayer request.

Verse 1. In addition, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored just as it was with you.

Paul wants the gospel, the word of the Lord. You can write in there in your margin if you'd like, the gospel. That's what he has in mind. He wants the gospel to spread rapidly and be honored.

[12:48] The ESV captures Paul's illustration, I think, better than the CSB. The ESV says, speed ahead. Do you see that there in your Bible if you're using that particular version?

He wants the gospel to speed ahead. That's the illustration that Paul has in mind. It's appropriate that the Olympics began on Friday night.

He has in mind here a runner, running a race. Sometimes when Paul uses this illustration, he talks about himself. And sometimes he talks about the people to whom he is writing.

But in this particular case, Paul is talking about the gospel. And he wants the gospel to speed ahead and be honored. Think about what happens when you are watching one of the longer races. This does not happen with the shorter races like the 100-yard dash. But if you are watching a 200 or a 400 or an 800 or also it doesn't happen with the very long ones.

[13:52] You won't see it quite as much. But for example, a 200 or a 400 and you'll remember that they have like a staggered start, right? Everybody doesn't line up on the same line like a 100-meter dash because those who are on the outside are going to have to go a little further and so they get a little head start.

That's why it looks funny when the 200 and the 400 are starting. But think about what happens when that runner starts out in front. He's not really in front. And she's not really in front because she's going to have to make longer curves than the rest of the people.

So smart people who are mathematicians and do calculus and things like that, they figured this out and they're like, well, this is the fair stagger. What happens if that person who looks like they're in first when the race starts just sort of takes their time?

They're like, well, I'm ahead. No, no, no. You're not ahead. It just looks like you're ahead. But you got to keep moving. You got to run. What do we do? We cheer for that person.

And maybe as you're watching this race, there's some give and take, right? Maybe you don't know for sure who's going to win and the victor seems to be sort of up in the air yet.

[15:04] Do you stop cheering? No. What about when your person, the person that you want to win, gets two or three or four or five or ten yards ahead?

Do you stop cheering then? No, you're cheering even more, right? Because it's not over yet. We keep cheering and we ought to keep praying.

Not because the gospel is failing, but because the gospel is winning and will win. And so we keep praying.

What do we pray? Well, we pray that unbelievers will respond like the believers in Thessalonica. That's what Paul wants. I want the word of God to be speed ahead, to run ahead, and be honored like it was with you.

Remember what we read back in 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 4. We know, brothers and sisters, loved by God, that he has chosen you because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance.

[16:24] That's what Paul wants to spread everywhere. That kind of a response to the gospel. And Paul says, if people are going to respond to the gospel that way, then you need to pray about it.

Paul's first request, pray that the gospel may spread rapidly, may speed ahead, and be honored. This is a freebie.

The word honored, it has the root of glory, that the gospel might be glorified. Why is prayer important?

Well, prayer is important because there are real threats to gospel ministry, and they are treacherous. And so Paul says, pray for us.

Verse 2. Second request, that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not all have faith.

[17:38] Second request, deliverance from ungodly unbelievers. Who are these people that Paul says need to be delivered from?

Who are these people? Well, it could be that Paul has in mind those who persecute Christians. We know that this church is enduring persecution.

We also know that this church started Acts chapter 17 from some pretty violent persecution. It could be that Paul has in mind those who are persecuting the church.

But then I have to ask myself, why does Paul add this extra phrase at the end, for not all have faith? That seems redundant, doesn't it?

If Paul is talking about unbelievers outside the church who are persecuting the Christians and trying to tear down Christians, why would Paul say, for not all have faith?

[18:45] That seems redundant. Of course they don't have faith, or they wouldn't be persecuting us. Let's take a little look and just let's make this brief.

That'll be my fault. That'll be my problem. Let's make this brief. I want to show you three clues for why I think Paul has a second group of people in mind. I think Paul has in mind here a curious group of people professing unbelievers.

People who are in the church but not of the church. People who might be saying and professing certain things and maybe even gathering with a church, God's people for worship, and yet those people are not truly born again, not truly saved, not truly converted.

Let me show you three clues for why I think this might be the case. Clue number one. This word wicked.

Do you see that there in your Bible? Wicked and evil people. Now when we see wicked, we just have one thing in mind, right? Like wicked. We know what that means.

[20:02] Evil, gross, filthy, disgusting, despicable. It's that. Maybe it's even satanic, right? That's what we think about when we think about wicked. But the word underneath this literally means out of place.

Like a dislocated finger. Like being afraid of water and going fishing. And you're in the middle of this boat, this lake, on a boat, and you're afraid of water.

What are you? Well, you are out of place. Biblically speaking, that would be wicked. But it doesn't carry the connotations here that we think of when we think about wicked.

Think about a person who shows up to a ball game, realizes nobody is sitting in that front row, and makes their way to that row, and just sits in those seats.

What are you? You're out of place. Wicked literally means out of place. Second clue. Paul uses this phrase, not all have faith.

[21:16] Not all have faith. Not everyone has faith. When Paul uses this phrase, and when we see this particular phrase elsewhere in Scripture, it is often used to call out distinctions within a single group.

For example, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8, and verse 7, not everyone has this knowledge. Not everyone. He's making a distinction within a larger group.

Or how about this one? I think this will be familiar. Matthew chapter 7, the Lord Jesus is speaking, and he says, do you remember this? Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord. That to me is an interesting little clue. Also, Romans 10 and verse 16, Paul writing about the people of Israel says, not all obeyed the gospel.

This is the second clue. That when he says, not all have faith, this little phrase at the end of his prayer request directs us to distinctions within a group of people.

[22 : 35] Not everyone. Not all. people. The third clue. Paul uses this phrase here, wicked and evil people.

See that there in your Bible? That phrase, wicked and evil. Remember the context. Remember our context here. The broader context. Chapter 2 and verse 2.

I think this is on the screen. Let me read it for you. We ask you, brothers and sisters, not to be easily upset or troubled either by a prophecy or a message or by a letter supposedly from us alleging that the day of the Lord has come.

Now we get a little more on this clue number 3 back in 1 Thessalonians 5 and verse number 19. Paul writes this, don't stifle the spirit.

Don't despise prophecies, but test all things. Hold on to what is good and notice verse 22. Stay away from every kind of evil.

[23 : 53] If you want to do a little more digging, jot down 2 Timothy chapter 4 in your notes. There, Paul refers to the same type of false teaching coming into the Thessalonian church and he uses this idea there as well of it being evil.

Paul's second request is a deliverance from wicked, from out of place, evil people.

I believe he's talking about people within the church who have put forward this idea that Jesus has already come and they are causing God's people to be all stirred up and upset and anxious.

And Paul warns the Christians about being deceived. That would lead us to consider this group of people as being evil. If you are deceiving and misleading God's people, if you are leading God's people astray, if you are deceiving and dividing and devouring God's people, you are those I believe that Paul would say are wicked.

You are out of place and evil. That seems strong, doesn't it? That Paul would talk that way about someone within a church, someone who shows up for worship, someone who says gospel-y things.

[25 : 34] that Paul would call this out. But don't forget, when Paul was in Ephesus, as he is leaving the Ephesian elders on the beach, Acts chapter 20, Paul says to the elders, the elders of the church, to beware, because from among your own selves, savage wolves will rise up and devour.

If this were up to me, I would swing the pendulum to one of two extremes. I would say, either we are going to expose and purge these professing unbelievers, they are doing more damage than good. Or, we're just going to separate the church and pull ourselves away from them and quarantine ourselves away from all of those who don't think exactly like we do all the way down every doctrinal line.

but remember and allow this to stir up compassion and mercy in your heart.

That little phrase that Paul tacks on the end of his prayer request, not all have faith. These professing unbelievers need to be in a place where they will hear the gospel proclaimed and they will be in the context of other Christians who love and serve one another.

[27 : 25] That's how they're going to know. That's how they're going to come to understand that they do not have faith. They need the gospel.

And so, rather than doing what I would do, purging or quarantining, swinging a pendulum to one of two extremes, notice what Paul says in verse number three.

But, the Lord is faithful. Not everyone has faith. Not everyone has faith. But verse three, the Lord is faithful and he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.

What does this deliverance look like? Paul says we need to pray to be delivered from these wicked, these out of place and evil people who are deceiving and dividing and devouring the church.

And what does Paul say that deliverance will look like? It looks like remembering that the Lord is faithful. and remembering that the Lord will strengthen and guard you.

[28 : 49] That's the deliverance that Paul has in mind. Those opposing the gospel, those upsetting the faith of some, those who are deceiving and troubling the Christians, they need to be saved.

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy want the Thessalonians to remember that God is strengthening, that God is guarding them, because God is faithful. faithful. To what end is God strengthening and guarding? To what end? 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 23.

Same doctrinal problem happening here when Paul is writing to Timothy. 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse number 23. Oops, that's 1 Timothy.

That's not going to work. 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 23. Look at what Paul says. Reject foolish and ignorant disputes, because you know that they breed quarrels.

[30 : 10] The Lord's servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone able to teach and patient, instructing his opponents, those who are out of place and evil, instructing his opponents with gentleness.

Why? Perhaps God will grant them repentance, leading them to come to the knowledge of the truth. Then they may come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil who has taken them captive to do his will.

The deliverance that they need is to remember that the Lord is faithful and he will strengthen you to be patient and gentle. He will strengthen you to instruct your opponents in a way that God willing leads them to faith so that they come to their senses and they are no longer out of place among God's people.

Notice the exhortation in verse number four. I love this. Verse four, we have confidence in the Lord about you that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.

[31 : 51] This is, for example, like when parents say to their children, we are going out for dinner, you are not coming with, and we know that you are going to do all of the things that we have taught you to do.

We have confidence that you're going to do what you know you are supposed to do. Do you see that? This isn't passive aggressiveness.

This is encouraging exhortation. Paul says, we know, we know the gospel is at work among you. We know the Holy Spirit is filling you.

We know that you're dealing with persecution. We know that you've got people who are out of place among your church, and this is what we expect. We know, we have confidence that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.

Now, maybe you say, well, this feels overwhelming. It feels a little overwhelming not to be easily upset and troubled.

[33 : 04] It feels a little overwhelming not to swing to some particular extreme and deal with these people in an unkind, ungodly, un-Jesus way.

Don't forget Paul's exhortation from last week. We are to persevere in every good work and word. How, Paul? How are we going to persevere in every good work and word?

And the answer is in verse number five. May the Lord direct your hearts to God's love and Christ's endurance.

This is what we need. If we are going to be faithful to pray like those who truly believe that God is sovereign and despite the fact that we may be infiltrated with someone who is out of place because they do not yet have faith, then we need the Lord to direct our hearts to God's love so that we love because we have been loved first and Christ's perseverance so that we don't give up because Jesus endured the cross, despised the shame, and now is seated at the right hand of God the Father.

the presence of opposition does not indicate the absence of God.

[34 : 56] One of the most difficult things that I have wrestled with over the last two years is this reality. God could have stopped the events that shattered our lives.

God could have stopped the events that shattered our lives. And he did not.

why do we pray? We pray because we know that God is sovereign.

He could have stopped whatever event it is in your world that shattered your life. He could have stopped it. and he did not.

At so many points along the way decisions could have been made that would have resulted in a different outcome. You know that's true.

[36 : 24] He could have stopped it and he did not. the presence of opposition does not indicate the absence of God.

Why doesn't he stop it when trouble comes our way? Because his ways are not our ways. And he is doing things that we would not do. And he is not doing things that we would do because we're bad at moderation.

And our God is a God of both mercy and justice. We would try to purge out everything and everyone who is difficult.

Everyone and anything that causes us pain and suffering. We would try to protect ourselves from all of these things. Quarantine our hearts from suffering.

[37 : 29] And God says, no. You're swinging too far on the pendulum. No, no, no. But I am faithful. I am faithful to strengthen you.

I am faithful to guard you. My grace is sufficient. Not so that your life can be easy, but because I know that your life will be hard.

Jesus says this in John chapter 17 and verse number 14. The world hated them because they are not of the world.

just as I am not of the world. I am, notice, not praying that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

Paul's just echoing the words of Jesus, isn't he? Remember that God is faithful and he will strengthen and guard you.

[38 : 54] Jesus knows that your life is hard. Jesus could deliver you. That's what Jesus says here in his prayer to the Father. I could ask the Father to rescue you and deliver you out of all of the hardship that you are going to face.

And Jesus explicitly says, I'm not praying that. sometimes I wish he would have prayed that. But Jesus explicitly says, I am not praying that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

The presence of opposition does not indicate the absence of God. And so pray. Pray. not because prayer is a cop-out for God's sovereign grace. And not because prayer is a crutch for your evangelism.

No, pray because you believe that it is God alone who can soften hearts and make dead sinners live and give them faith so that they believe this gospel.

[40 : 13] Oh, dear one this morning who has not yet trusted in Jesus. Let me ask you, are you swinging the pendulum to some extreme? Have you landed at a place where you think everything and everyone is a God?

That you can get to God by any number of ways that you might choose? Maybe you've swung to a different pendulum and you have decided that there is no God at all.

or maybe you just say, well, I don't know. I don't know if there's a God. The gospel calls you to a centering away from both of these poles of the pendulum and to the center the gospel.

the father sent the son and the Lord Jesus is your only hope and despite what you might have become deceived to believe, there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Come to Jesus. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. follower of Jesus, pray. Pray.

[41 : 38] Not because prayer is all that you should do and not because prayer is the only thing you can do. Pray because our God is able to do far more abundantly than anything that you ask or think.

Ephesians chapter 3. pray, brother or sister, pray because you enjoy immediate access to the throne of grace and there according to the book of Hebrews you will find grace to help and mercy for all of your daily needs.

Pray. Pray because your father in heaven is a better parent than you are now or ever will be and he knows how to give good gifts to his children.

So pray. Pray because your savior the Lord Jesus is also your great high priest and he is interceding right now at God's right hand for you.

Pray because our God is faithful. God is faithful and prayer is one means by which God has ordained to accomplish his purpose of strengthening his people and guarding them from the evil one.

[43 : 14] Pray because the presence of opposition does not indicate the absence of God. when you want to quit because life is hard.

Obey Paul's exhortation by the Spirit's power. Set your mind on God's love and Jesus' endurance and pray that God would make you like Jesus.

Let's pray. pray. Father, we are grateful to receive your word and we understand our sin and our weakness and failure when it comes to prayer.

Would you please, Holy Spirit, grant us humility and repentance as we take a few moments to be honest with you in the quietness of our own hearts with our tendency to swing to various extremes and to fail to remember to pray.

Father, your word to us in John's first epistle tells us if we confess our sin that you are faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[45 : 00] Because of the blood of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, we claim this promise that you would be unjust to not forgive us our sins.

Thank you for the blood of Jesus that is sufficient for our sins past, present, and future.

we receive and much more than that, we revel in this amazing grace, this wonderful forgiveness that is ours because of Jesus.

And we rest securely with long-haul assurance in righteousness that is not our own.

it is Jesus' righteousness. Father, thank you for giving us immediate access to your throne of grace.

Help us to take advantage like needy dependent children on your grace and your mercy to us that is new every day.

[46 : 17] for the sake of the gospel, for our good, and for your glory, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, we pray.

Amen. Amen.