



Prayer and Perseverance

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

Sometimes we Christians get uncomfortable and self-conscious when it comes to sharing the grace and truth found in Jesus because we think we don't know what to say or when or how to say it, but these excuses are something of a smokescreen because in reality we are all unofficial spokesmen and evangelists for any other number of causes. We're constantly sharing and communicating news. (Isn't that what social media is all about?) Our latest vacation or favorite recipe or some new product has revolutionized our lives, and we want that message to get out there among our family and friends. If we're willing to post about cruises and cupcakes, then what's the holdup about Christ?

The unspoken reason for our reluctance is that we know from Scripture and from our own experience that the Bible's message of "repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15) is not well received by all and stubbornly and vehemently rejected by some, for as Paul writes, "not everyone has faith." But rather than grow content with our cowardice and inaction, Paul gives us the solution to this impasse: it starts with prayer. We know quite well what those around us need to hear, what we lack is the God-given courage and love to say it. If we don't open our mouths, it's guaranteed that nothing will change. But the power to affect the change of heart and life that God wants doesn't come from our eloquence or superior reasoning. It is the product of the Holy Spirit. So we pray not only for courage but also for God's blessing, that he would open ears and minds to receive his word for what it is with honor and thanksgiving and humble acceptance. As always, we can have no success on our own. The way forward begins with complete dependence on the Lord.

With him as our foundation and starting point, then should our confession be met with indifference, rejection, or even outright hostility, we know that he is beside and behind us. He will shield and protect us. He will keep us strong in faith and safe in body so that no harm can befall us apart from his loving plan. We stand certain and fearless in this promise because "the Lord is faithful." As the historical record of Scripture reveals: once issued, God cannot go back on his word. Faithfulness is one of God's essential attributes, his perfections, that he cannot abandon else he would be denying himself. In the same way the Bible also says God is just (2 Thess. 1:6); God is love (1 John 4:8); God is merciful (Deut. 4:31). When we pray, "Deliver us from evil," we are expecting God to keep evil away, to limit its reach, to give us the strength to bear up under it, and finally to make it turn out for our good.

Paul demonstrates his own confidence in the power of the Word and his respect for the spiritual maturity of his readers. He trusts that the Lord's love and the example of Christ's perseverance will direct or "straighten out" our hearts and reconfigure our understanding and motives so that we correctly apply and willingly put into practice his instructions in this letter. In this way God's power and grace are not micromanaged, but set free to do what God has equipped them to do.

Prayer: Faithful Lord Jesus, filled with your love and safe under your protective power, make me strong to share the message of your truth with a lost and hostile world, so that all may honor and believe in you as their eternal Savior. Amen.