

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 | Evil People & The Evil One

Written by John Fox | 8.6.2023

Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Title: Evil People & The Evil One

FCF: Persecution

Shaft: Christians must endure knowing they have an ultimate enemy.

INTRO

Rabbi Matt & Encouragement PT2

Last week Pastor Myeong preached on the everyday importance of the gospel. And he did great! He also mentioned that Rabbi Matt would be preaching, but unfortunately he's not able to make it. You might not have heard, but Rabbi Matt has recently been diagnosed with Myeloid Leukemia. He has said that it's treatable and the doctors are optimistic, but let's still pray for him.

- Pray

This week is part two of Paul's encouragement to believers in the midst of persecution. Everyone experiences suffering in this world, but we see that believers in Jesus face normal suffering + hardship and persecution from the unbelieving world. Now we may not have our possessions confiscated and be sent to prison, yet. But we are seeing an increasing hostility against believers in Jesus these days.

Examples

- Sex education for public school kids- Bill 5395
- Transgender pronoun usage, 57+ genders
- LGBTQ+ evangelism /Pride month
- SPU- a religious college- faces lawsuits for operating on traditional Christian values for marriage and sexuality.¹
- "Silence is violence" "Toxic Silence"²

¹ The policy requires staffers to refrain from "cohabitation, extramarital sexual activity and same-sex sexual activity," and those who violate it face disciplinary action, including the possibility of employment termination." <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/washington-state-probes-christian-universitys-anti-lgbtq-employment-po-rcna41001>

² <https://www.peterlang.com/document/1056881>

There is real backlash to not fully embrace secular positions on these points. Paul and the Thessalonians had different issues. Roman idol worship, worship of Caesar, cult prostitution. Declaring that there is One God who created us instead of worshiping the Greek pantheon. But it raises the question, what do Christians do with persecutions?

Main Point

Main Point: Christians will experience persecution, but endure them through Jesus.

Points: This passage shows us how to endure as Christians in the face of evil.

1. Pray the word spreads, is honored, and we're delivered.
2. Know our enemy & God's faithfulness
3. Endure Focus on Christ's endurance
 - a. Doesn't puff up or discourage, Heb 12:1-2
 - b. Such were some of you

1. Pray

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

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

Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray three things for them.

1) The word of the Lord may spread rapidly...

We can't look over the fact that the first thing Paul prays is for the gospel to go forth, quickly! This was an incredible time in the history of the world. Because of Paul, Barnabas, and others, the good news of Jesus Christ did go forth like quicksilver. Paul would be martyred for his belief in Jesus, but nearly 250 years later in **A.D. 312** Constantine converted to Christianity and ended Christian persecution. The Thessalonian prayers were answered! And may they continue.

2) ...and be honored (glorified-experienced)

Paul also asked that this gospel, this word of the Lord, would be honored. This word can also be translated as glorified. Now, Paul does not mean that God's word is not honorable or won't be glorified. No. It's a way of wishing that other people would be caught up in, or experience this life-changing word. Practically speaking, this is a prayer I always pray whenever reading the Bible. You can read the Bible and it can mean nothing to you. It's flat. Bland. Lifeless. That is, unless God moves you through the Holy Spirit to experience His glory. John Piper has a method for reading

the bible based on this idea. APTAT (Admit, Pray, Trust, Act, Thank).³ Additionally, there is a vivid word picture in these two ideas of a **runner** finishing his course who experiences the **adulation** of the onlookers.

3) ...may be delivered from wicked and evil people...

Christians don't need to pray for persecution. It will come, and Paul doesn't mince words about it. Christians should pray for rescue, or deliverance from hardship for being a Christian, even if earthly rescue doesn't come in God's providence. Christians also need to recognize evil people while at the same time knowing they don't have faith.

What I'm most struck by is how Paul orders his request. In facing hardship we naturally would pray for deliverance first and the spread of the gospel last. But prayer is a supernatural thing. It's one of God's ways of involving us and changing us. As **Spurgeon** said,

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The theory of some is, that prayer is useful to ourselves, but that it cannot be operative upon God; and much is said about the impossibility of the Divine purposes being changed, and the utter unlikelihood of a finite being affecting God by his cries. We also hold that the purposes of God are not changed; but what if prayer be a part of His purpose, and what if He ordains that His people should pray when He intends to give them blessings? Prayer is one of the necessary wheels of the machinery of providence. The offering of prayer is as operative in the affairs of the world, and the production of events, as the rise of dynasties or the fall of nations. We believe that God in very truth hearkens to the voices of men.⁴

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to pray because he knew it would work. In doing so, he gives us a humble model to follow. When we are pressed by evil people and persecuted, let's keep in mind Paul's call to prayer. We cannot change a heart, but God can.

2. Know

2 Thessalonians 3:3-4

3 But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. 4 We have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.

It's one thing to recognize evil people, but from a Biblical worldview we also recognize there is a source to this evil. The truth is we have an immortal, cosmically powerful, supernatural, malevolent being who is our enemy every day of our lives. His evil is beyond our conception. Satan may seem outdated and ludicrous to many people today- Cartoon images come to mind; but believers do

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/a-p-t-a-t>

⁴ An All Around Ministry. Faith. Pg. 11.

have an immortal enemy who is animating the evil forces in this world. We may be tempted to forget or even disbelieve in the Devil, but here's what C.S. Lewis said.

C.S. Lewis Quote

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”

We so easily do the former. In our unbelieving state the Bible says,

Ephesians 2:1-3

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins 2 in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. 3 We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also.

Before Christ, we were evil people. And in that time we did Satan's work. But now, we are called to be sober-minded in relation to the Devil.

1 Peter 5:8-9

8 Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. 9 Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.

Image of God

Have you ever wondered why Satan would hate you so much? I believe it's because of the image of God. Every time Satan sees us, he sees an image of God. And he hates God. The more we look like Jesus, the more he desires to destroy us.

But Paul reinforces to us, in all our difficulties, the Lord is faithful. It's not about us. It's about Him. What He starts he will finish. He has the power to see us through. If our conversion is genuine, we will continue in the Lord's commands.

In the persecutions we experience for bearing the name of Jesus, we must keep in mind that we have an enemy who desires to defame God and destroy us. This knowledge should shape how we respond when evil people, animated by the Evil One, treat us wrongly. It should also cause us to turn to God as our strength and not rely on our own abilities.

3. Endure

2 Thessalonians 3:5

5 May the Lord direct your hearts to God's love and Christ's endurance.

Ending this section, Paul prays for the Thessalonians, again. In doing so he prays that the Lord would direct their hearts. The "heart" to this Roman audience was the center of their lives. Therefore, Paul is praying that the Lord would guide the Thessalonians such that His love and the endurance of Christ would be manifested in them. But this isn't merely gutting out obedience. This word for endurance also comes up in Hebrews speaking of what Christ did.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, 2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 **For consider him** who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up.

The way we can endure persecution is to keep the example of Jesus at the center. As we view Jesus' love and power in laying down his life on the cross and taking it back up from the grave we are given a boost. A runner's high, if you will, despite the difficulties. Through Jesus we can endure any persecution. Along the lines of our enemy's mindset again, C.S. Lewis imagines the correspondence of a Sr. Demon to a Jr. Demon trying to destroy a Christian and says,

C.S. Lewis Quote

"Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys."⁵

The good news, church, is that Jesus obeyed the Father's will and endured the greatest persecution so that we might be with him in his glory forever. A vision of that will enable us to endure.

CONCLUSION

Main Point: Christians will experience persecution, but endure them through Jesus.

⁵ C.S. Lewis. The Screwtape Letters.