

THE THESSALONIAN EPISTLES: DIRECTION FOR THE LAST DAYS

X. Discipling Amid Angelic Conflict

(2 Thessalonians 3:1-5)

I. Introduction

- A. Paul's epistles to the believers at Thessalonica addressed new converts out of raw paganism who faced persecution and false teaching, a recipe for spiritual defeat if they failed to get adequate spiritual insight.
- B. Paul had written this second epistle to the Thessalonians to correct an errant, troubling view of the rapture they faced, and correcting troubling error involves wrestling in angelic conflict where the Evil One seeks to corrupt true beliefs to disrupt the discipling process. (cf. Matthew 13:24-43 on the parables of the tares, the mustard seed, and the leaven). Thus, in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5, Paul sidetracked from his main theme in the epistle to address that spiritual war to provide guidance for his readers, so we view that passage for our edification:

II. Discipling Amid Angelic Conflict, 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5.

- A. Due to the angelic conflict, God's spiritual leaders in the Church need prayer to minister, 2 Thess. 3:1-2:
 - 1. Though Paul's readers were new converts to Christ (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, p. 1697, 1704), he realized that they belonged to Christ and Christ answered their prayers as believers, so Paul urged them to pray for him and his ministry team, 2 Thessalonians 3:1a.
 - 2. Paul had two requests regarding his ministry team, and both relate to the angelic conflict, 2 Thess. 3:1b-2:
 - a. He asked that his readers pray that the Word of God they preached might "advance rapidly" (*trecho*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 717; The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 408-409) and be glorified as it had with them, 2 Thess. 3:1b. Satan opposes the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4), what necessitates such prayer.
 - b. Paul also asked that his team might be "rescued" (*hruomai*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 744-745) from "perverse" (*atopon*) and "actively harmful" (*poneron*) men who did not believe in Christ, 2 Thess. 3:2; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 722. Such men are under Satan's influence, John 8:44.
- B. Despite Satanic opposition, God will make sure that new converts can grow in Christ, 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5:
 - 1. In contrast to unbelieving perverse and actively harmful foes, Paul was assured that his readers who had believed the Gospel would be established by the Lord Who is faithful, that God would "guard" (*phulasso*, Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 876) them "from the Evil One." (*apo tou ponerou*, where the definite article *tou* ["the"] makes the word "evil" be "Evil One," or Satan), 2 Thess. 3:3; Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T., p. 718.
 - 2. Furthermore, Paul expressed confidence in the Lord's involvement with his believing readers that they were both doing and would yet do the things that he as an apostle had directed them to do, 2 Thess. 3:4.
 - 3. Paul expressed confident hope that the Lord might yet do two things for his readers, 2 Thessalonians 3:5:
 - a. He expressed confident hope that the Lord might "direct, lead" (*kateuthuno*, Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 423) their hearts (inner man) into "God's love for them," a subjective genitive, 2 Thess. 3:5a. (Wm. Hendriksen, Expos. Of I and II Thessalonians, 1974, p. 197) Realization of God's great love for a believer motivates and directs him to heed the next step God willed to produce in Paul's readers.
 - b. Paul also expressed confident hope that the Lord might direct and lead his readers' hearts into the *hupomone* of Christ. In the context Paul's having disciplined the Thessalonians amid the persecution they had suffered in Acts 17:1-10a, *hupomone* implies the "brave patience with which the Christian contends against the various hindrances, persecutions, and temptations that befall in his conflict with the inward and outward world." (Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; Richard C. Trench, Syns. of the N. T., 1973, p. 195-200) Paul was confidently hopeful that his readers would be led of God in appreciation for God's great love for them to follow the example of Christ in His sufferings to provide redemption for mankind.

Lesson: (1) *The angelic conflict rages around the discipling process. (2) Thus, those who disciple must be upheld in prayer that the Word of God might encouragingly rapidly advance and be glorified in their work and that they might be rescued from perverse and actively harmful foes who are under Satan's influence. (3) However, God guards new converts to a degree from Satan that they might grow in the faith, obey what they have been taught from Scripture and be led of God to appreciate His love for them that they might bravely endure the trials of life.*

Application: (1) *May we intercede in prayer for those who disciple others, for disciplers are targets of Satan, and they need to see the Lord make their efforts productive in His grace and they need protection from Satanically influenced people who harmfully counter them. (2) May we be confident that God protectively guards the welfare and spiritual growth of new converts that they might grow in appreciating God's love for them and endure trials.*