*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 14 - 19

Letters of Paul

**Monday, February 14 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2**

“Pray for us”

Having concluded his prayer for the Thessalonians at the end of chapter 2, Paul proceeds to ask for their prayers on his behalf. The first of two closely linked requests has to do with the message of the Lord, a phrase essentially synonymous with the gospel of Christ. He requests that they pray for the advance or progress of the message, that it may be spread. He also asks prayer that the message be honored, that is, not merely proclaimed, but accepted or acknowledged for what it actually is, the word of God.

Whereas Paul’s first request is on behalf of the message, the second one is for the messengers who proclaim it: that Paul and his companions may be delivered from wicked and evil people, that is, people who maliciously obstruct the gospel, like the people in Thessalonica who had instigated a riot in order to hinder the preaching of the gospel. That not everyone is a believer explains the hostility encountered by the missionaries, which in turn obstructs the progress of the gospel message.

*I pray that your message spreads, Lord, and is honored. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 15 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5**

“The Lord is faithful”

Paul returns to his primary concern: the encouragement of the community. While people who are evil lack faith (verse 2), the Lord is faithful and will continue to strengthen and protect his followers from the evil one. Having reassured them of God’s love and concern for the community, he exhorts them to obedience and perseverance in response to what God is doing. Moreover, by praising the Thessalonians for what they have been doing and expressing his confidence in the Lord that they will continue to do so, Paul is preparing the way for the instructions he is about to give in verses 6-15.

Having slipped from prayer in verses 1-2 back into exhortation in verses 3-4, Paul in verse 5 returns to prayer to close this section of the letter. He prays that the Lord might direct the Thessalonians’ attention to two important points. The first, God’s love, gives assurance that their life is grounded in God. The second, Christ’s perseverance, sets before them Christ as the example of what Paul has repeatedly been encouraging them to do, that is, to persevere.

*Strengthen me, Lord, and guard me from the evil one. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 16 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10**

“Against idle living”

These verses, and the ones that follow in 11-15, are Paul’s response to a situation in Thessalonica generated by excessive interest in and excitement about the return of Jesus. Some, believing his return to be imminent, had abandoned their jobs and were living in idleness, depending on the generosity of others in the church. Using himself and his fellow missionaries as their example, he commands those who are idle to go back to work, and those who are supporting them in their idleness to cease doing so. Idleness is not the appropriate preparation for the Lord’s return. What Paul and his colleagues had taught during their initial visit they had also lived themselves; that is, they deliberately practiced what they preached.

Even while Paul explicitly affirms that individuals who are able to work have a responsibility to do so, he takes for granted the responsibility of the congregation to meet the basic needs of its members. In this way Paul seeks to make sure that no able people live unjustifiably from other people’s work, and that those who are unable to work still have their needs met.

*While we await your return, Lord, we will continue to be productive for you. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 14 - 19

Letters of Paul

**Thursday, February 17 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12**

“Idle living leads to meddling”

Those who are no longer busy working have become busybodies. With time on their hands, they are behaving irresponsibly and thereby becoming burdens to the rest of the congregation. It is not so much that these people were inactive, but that they were active in an unproductive, irresponsible, or disruptive manner. Those whom Paul criticizes may have claimed that they were engaged in the legitimate “work” of preparing for Christ’s return. It was, however, from Paul’s perspective not work at all but only a distraction that led the community away from living productive lives for Christ even as they all awaited his return.

Paul spells out his solution to the problem. Using the name of the Lord, thereby claiming that the full authority of Christ stands behind these commands, and to reject them is to reject not merely Paul and his colleagues, but the Lord himself, he commands them to settle down and go back to work to earn their own living. In this way they will stop being an unnecessary burden to the rest of the community.

*Undue focus on the future, Lord, will make me ineffective in the present. Amen.*

**Friday, February 18 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15**

“Never tire of doing good”

Even as Paul authoritatively commands the idle, he encourages the rest of the congregation to never tire of doing what is right. Here we catch a glimpse of the negative impact the idle were having on the congregation. Those who were living responsibly, in accordance with the apostolic teaching, perhaps were being worn down by the burden of providing not only for themselves and any who legitimately deserved assistance, but also for those who refused to work.

Paul clearly hopes that the idle will comply voluntarily with his instructions. If the compliance, however, is not forthcoming, the congregation itself must take steps to enforce them by avoiding association with that person. The precise extent to which contact is to be broken off is unclear. At first glance, verse 14 seems rather broad: “Do not associate with” the person being disciplined, but the goal of nonassociation is clearly spelled out: “so they will be ashamed.” Paul’s goal is restoration, not alienation. They are not to treat the offender as an enemy but to warn them as a brother or sister, that is, treat them as an insider, still a member of the congregation.

*It can be hard to do good, Lord, when others who should be aren’t. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 19 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18**

“Closing comments”

When Paul prays for their peace, he has in view not simply an absence of conflict within the congregation (perhaps provoked by the problem of those who were idle) or (in light of the persecution and affliction they had experienced) between the congregation and the larger community. Peace, for Paul, also encompasses a state of well-being and wholeness characterized by reconciled relationships – with God, with each other in the congregation, and finally with those outside the community, to the extent possible.

It was not uncommon for a person dictating a letter to take the pen from the secretary or scribe who actually wrote the letter and write the last sentence or two in his (or her) own hand. Paul seems to have done this as a matter of habit. Paul’s confirmation that “this is how I write” (a reference to his handwriting style rather than what he wrote) provides the recipients with an indication of authenticity (the handwriting would have matched that at the end of the first letter).

*We pray for peace, Lord, with you, with each other, and with the world. Amen.*