

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2**PREFACE**

At the end of Chapter Two, Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, that “our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.” (2 Thessalonians 2: 16-17)

Now, at the beginning of Chapter Three, the last section of these two Thessalonian letters written from Corinth, he requests prayer for himself and his comrades—which would include, at least, Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy.

v1

We learn so much from the apostle, but we learn more than just doctrine or prophecy. We learn priorities and character—we learn from Paul what should be of utmost importance in our own lives. Note what he does *not* request:

- he does not ask for good health
- he does not ask that his work load might be eased
- he does not ask for a safe journey to his next city
- he does not ask for relief from his aches and pains

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2.

I conducted my own survey on Paul’s closing prayer requests at the end of all his epistles and found only similar requests. His priority is clear: the advancement of Christ’s gospel and the building up of His church.

Don’t misunderstand: I am not suggesting that we never make such requests, especially in a setting such as a Sunday School class or other small group, or to a brother or sister in Christ. I just want to highlight that Paul desired that each church’s prayers for him and his fellows be focused on the success of their work for Christ; that was most important. Inconveniences, aches and pains, exhaustion were so far down the list he did not even mention them as prayer requests. Even the slightly more personal v2 remains focused not on removing a personal inconvenience, but on removing recurring obstructions to their ministry.

Paul eloquently summarizes his philosophy of service in his letter to the Philippians.

Read Philippians 1:12-21.

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored (ESV)

Frankly, I think the apostle Paul was a closet sports nut. If he were alive today I think he would be watching NFL football every Sunday afternoon, and certainly would be glued to the coverage of the Olympics—especially track and field events. Paul very often employs athletic imagery to make his point.

Here in v1 he uses two terms lifted from the world of athletic competition.

spread rapidly^{nasb. niv}, **have free course**^{kjv}, **run swiftly**^{nkjv}, **speed ahead**^{esv} = *treche* = apparently a primary verb (properly *threcho*; compare <G2359> (*thrix*)); which uses *dremo*, *drem'-o* (the base of <G1408> (*dromos*)) as alternate in certain tenses; **to run or walk hastily** (literal or figurative) :- have course, run.

Paul uses the same word several times in a more familiar passage.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24.

Therefore I **run** in such a way, as not without aim; I **box** in such a way, as not beating the air; (1 Corinthians 9:26)

glorified, honored = *doxazo* = from <G1391> (*doxa*); **to render (or esteem) glorious** (in a wide application) :- (make) glorify (-ious), full of (have) glory, **honour**, magnify; "this speaks of triumph" (Thomas), as in the triumph of the victor at the end of the race.

Does Paul want them to pray that *their* feet would be swift, that *they* would be honored? No, he prays that "the word (*logos*) [NIV, ESV, message] of the Lord" would do this. Perhaps Paul was thinking about the wonderful passage in Isaiah that speaks of this.

Read Isaiah 55:10-12.

just as it did also with you;

Paul reminds them of their extraordinary response to his teaching. They not only believed in Paul's gospel—they ran with it!

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

They got it. Even in a time of tribulation, they embraced the gospel and then ran with it.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10.

By the time Paul arrived at his next stop, Berea, he was already receiving reports of the Thessalonians' moving out into the Macedonian and Achaian region to share the gospel. They had already put into practice what Paul was asking them to pray—that the word of the Lord would "speed ahead and be honored."

v2

Verse 2 is a reminder of where Paul was when he wrote this letter, and what he was probably seeing out his window and out on the streets when he went to the market: the citizens and culture of Corinth, the Las Vegas of the ancient world. And he describes what he sees—and those who were causing him severe problems.

and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.

This last week the ex-basketball player, Dennis Rodman, returned to North Korea to have chats with his good buddy, potbellied dictator Kim Jong Un. I do not follow Mr. Rodman, nor do I follow professional sports, but whenever the image of the basketball player is inflicted upon me by the news, my reaction is always the same.

My head snaps back in brutal astonishment over the things he has done to his appearance: an assortment of pins and rings and other sharp objects piercing his lips, nose, and ears; strange colors applied to his hair; his body covered in bizarre tattoos. And my response is always, "This guy is truly *strange*."

In v2, where you read Paul's first description of these individuals—the word "perverse," "unreasonable" or "wicked"—imagine a picture of Dennis Rodman.

atopos = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G5117> (topos); **out of place, i.e. (figurative) improper**, injurious, wicked :- **amiss**, harm, unreasonable; unusual, outrageous, wrong [as in, "That's just *wrong!*"].

I'm not suggesting Dennis Rodman is wicked; I know nothing of the man beyond what he looks like. But even in *this* strange world, I do suggest that in most settings Dennis Rodman stands out visually as "out of place." And thus his *appearance* is a good illustration for this word. But Paul uses the word to express something more than someone just "out of place"; these are people who are injurious in their outrageousness; they enjoy inflicting harm.

The second way Paul describes those who were encumbrances to the spread of the gospel is that they were evil. And when one looks beneath the surface of this word, one sees that Paul is subtly setting up the topic he will address in the rest of the chapter.

evil, wicked = *poneros* = from a derivative of <G4192> (ponos); **hurtful, i.e. evil** (properly in effect or influence, and thus differing from <G2556> (kakos), which refers rather to essential character, as well as from <G4550> (sapos), which indicates degeneracy from original virtue); figurative calamitous; also (passive) ill, i.e. diseased; but especially (morally) culpable, i.e. **derelict**, vicious, facinorous; neuter (singular) **mischief**, malice, or (plural) guilt; masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners :- bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked (-ness). See also <G4191> (ponerotos).

Robert L. Thomas: "Evil" speaks of persons not only themselves thoroughly corrupted but intent on corrupting others and drawing them into their own slide toward perdition.

But I mentioned that this word also connects up with the topic he discusses in the rest of this chapter. If one traces this word back to its roots—**poneros** < **ponos** (labor, pain, toil) < **penes** (poor, indigent) < **peno** (to toil for daily subsistence)—one discovers the roots to the apostles' thoughts regarding certain members of the Thessalonian congregation who were being slackers—i.e., *not* toiling for their daily subsistence.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11.

for not all have faith.

The third way Paul identifies these troublemakers is that they were not men of faith.

faith = *pistis* = from <G3982> (peitho); persuasion, i.e. credence; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher), **especially reliance upon Christ for salvation**; abstract constancy in such profession; by extensive the system of religious (Gospel) truth itself :- assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity.

There are differences of opinion on who Paul refers to here. The statement, on its own, is undeniably true: not all men are men of faith. But we cannot disregard where Paul was while he was penning this letter; there were many Jews in the city of Corinth who vehemently opposed his teaching.

Read Acts 18:5-6.

Read Acts 18:12-13.

[stay in Acts for a moment]

If we understand this reference as one to unbelieving Jews—Jews who did not just quarrel with some of the doctrines of Christian faith, but who violently opposed Christ—then this wraps back to his description of them as “evil.”

Remember how Thomas defined this word *poneros*: “persons not only themselves thoroughly corrupted but intent on corrupting others.” They chose not to trust in Christ, but their true evil is seen in their campaign to prevent *anyone* from believing in Him.

[Back up to Chapter Seventeen in Acts.](#) We have read before of the opposition that Paul experienced from the Jews in Thessalonica, who were not satisfied to just run him out of Thessalonica, but pursued him even to the next town, Berea, and ran him out of there!

Read Acts 17:5, 10.

Read Acts 17:13-14.

We are presently living in a period very much like what Paul experienced. Politically there are those, primarily on the left, who are not satisfied with simple disagreement; they must expunge from society, from the earth itself all policies and philosophies with which they disagree. And now, like the radical jihadists, they have begun taking steps to rid the earth of even the people who disagree with them.

In the area of religion and faith, we have the selfsame jihadists who do not believe in the philosophy of “live and let live”; they must kill anyone who disagrees with them.

The Jews chasing after the apostle Paul were not interested in healthy debate; just as with some other groups today, their purpose was the shut down debate—and kill the messenger of Christ’s good news.