

251 Four Commands - II Thessalonians Chapter 3

In his second letter to the Christian community in Thessalonica Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has reminded them, and us, that there will be times of suffering and trial along the way for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. These times are passing, to be replaced by times of divine vengeance on the perpetrators, and times of glory for all those in Christ (1.4-12). Christians are to stand firm and hold fast to “the traditions we have been taught” (2.15), especially in view of the emergence from the shadows of “the man of sin, the son of perdition, that Wicked” (2.3,3,8). This character, placed at the head of a grim team of associates (see notably Revelation Chapter 4-18), is Satan’s increasingly-desperate attempt to replace Almighty God with himself, an attempt first apparent in the Garden of Eden.

In view of this situation, in II Thessalonians Chapter 3 Paul asks for their prayers, “that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith” (from 3.1-2). It was tough for Paul and his companions in his day, and often we are no strangers to this toughness today: our recognition of what is going on in society, and why, coupled with habits of steady prayer for one another, are vital ingredients in our response.

Then in Chapter 3 come four “commands”. First, in verse 4, Paul is confident that the Thessalonians both do, and will continue to do, “the things which we command you”. Paul and his fellow apostles wielded a divinely-bestowed authority, meaning that their teachings were to be accepted as true, and that their practical behaviour was to be accepted as correct, and hence to be followed by the Christian believers themselves (v 7).

The same holds good for today. The Christian Faith involves both a set of given doctrines, (resting on impeccable credentials – these are no mere “cunningly devised fables” (2 Peter 1.16)), and the practical consequences of those doctrines guiding how we are to live and behave. We are thus in the realm here of authority over us, commandment to us, and divine expectation of us! Yes, mercifully we are in the era of God’s grace, but that grace has nothing to do with “eezy-oh-zee, let’s all believe and do just what suits us”.

The second commandment (verse 6), given specifically “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”, reads, “that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us”.

Here we have it again: there is Christian truth, and there is falsehood masquerading as Christian truth, and unfortunately that remains as valid today within Christian circles as ever. The handling of doctrinal disagreements between Christians is ever-sensitive and demands great care, but a parting of the ways sometimes becomes necessary, to be done as brothers rather than as enemies if at all possible (vv 14-15 / eg., Romans 12.18).

Thirdly and fourthly in terms of commandments - “no sponging”! (vv 7-12), for some of the flock in Thessalonica had got the idea that others owed them a living while they themselves swanned around minding everyone else’s business.

Not so. Part of our normal Christian responsibility is to “pull our own weight”, to “earn our own keep” as we are able (vv 8,10b,11 / Ephesians 4.28 / I Thessalonians 4.11-12 / Romans 13.8 / Acts 18.3), so that we can provide for ourselves and our dependents, and have resources available to help those in genuine need who, for whatever reason, are unable to support themselves (eg., Acts 2.44-45 & 4.31-37 & 6.1-3). (As an interesting and topical parallel, we see that the British government is trying to eradicate occurrences of a “sponging culture” within the Welfare State, provoking shouts of protest, some genuine perhaps, and some perhaps not; the desire for some folk to have “an easy ride” at the expense of others, which diverts attention from those truly in need, continues to this day is evidently nothing new,).

After the exhortation, “But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing” (v 13), the letter closes with wonderful words, “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means The Lord be with you all The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (3.16,18).

Yes, as we encounter unpleasant trials, and the growing influence of “that Wicked”, and falsehood within Christian ranks, those in Christ remain the possessors, right now and in all that is to come, of God’s peace and of God’s grace (eg., Romans 5.1-11 and 8.28-39).

Truly we have every reason to put into practice that other exhortation, “In every thing give thanks” (I Thessalonians 5.18).

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