

2 Thessalonians 3:2-9 | Session 23

Series: 1 and 2 Thessalonians: Rightly Divided / Dr. Randy White

Confidence in the Lord's Faithfulness (3:3–5)

2 Thessalonians 3:3 – Black

- Paul responds to the problem raised in verse 2 by redirecting attention from unfaithful men to the faithful Lord.
- The contrast is intentional and foundational:
 - Men may lack faith.
 - The Lord does not.
- Paul treats God's faithfulness as an established reality, not a point requiring argument.
- From that faithfulness, Paul identifies two specific divine actions:
 - The Lord will **stablish** the Thessalonians.
 - The Lord will **keep** them from evil.
- "Stablish" (older spelling of *establish*) refers to providing firm footing or a stable base.
 - The emphasis is stability, not growth, success, or advancement.
 - This directly addresses the confusion and agitation described earlier in the letter.
- "Keep you from evil" describes active, intentional protection.
 - This is not passive moral innocence.
 - It is God's preserving action directed specifically toward these believers.
- Historically, the Thessalonians are early converts in Paul's ministry.
 - They live squarely in the apostolic age.
 - God's work in this period is often direct, immediate, and interventionist.
- This helps explain the unqualified confidence of Paul's language.
- In Paul's later epistles, the emphasis shifts:
 - Believers are instructed to establish themselves through study and discipline.
 - Protection is increasingly mediated through obedience and discernment rather than direct intervention.

2 Thessalonians 3:4 – Black

- Paul’s confidence now moves from the Lord’s faithfulness in general to the Thessalonians specifically.
- His confidence remains grounded “in the Lord,” not in human resolve or moral strength.
- Because the Lord is faithful, Paul expects obedience from those under his apostolic authority.
- He affirms both present and future obedience:
 - They **do** what he commands.
 - They **will continue** to do so.
- This obedience is demonstrated, not theoretical.
- A concrete example appears in 2 Thessalonians 2:15:
 - They were commanded to stand fast.
 - They were instructed to hold the traditions they had received.
- Paul’s confidence rests on their proven response to prior instruction.
- These commands should be carefully defined:
 - They are not directives concerning salvation.
 - They are not a universal program for sanctification.
- Instead, they reflect Paul’s unique apostolic authority over this early congregation.
- Paul assumes two things:
 - His authority is legitimate.
 - The Thessalonians are willing to submit to it.

2 Thessalonians 3:5 – Black

- Paul again shifts emphasis away from human action to divine activity.
- The Lord is presented as the active agent.
- What the Lord does is internal before it is external.
- He directs their **hearts**, not merely their behavior.
- Two destinations are named:
 - Into the love of God.
 - Into the patient waiting for Christ.
- The second phrase involves a grammatical ambiguity in the Greek genitive.
- Two readings are grammatically legitimate:
 - “Patient waiting *for* Christ.”
 - “Patience *of* Christ.”
- Most modern translations choose “patience/steadfastness of Christ.”
- The KJV chooses patience in waiting *for* Christ, preserving the eschatological emphasis.
 - Notably, the KJV marginal note acknowledges the alternate reading.
 - This demonstrates appropriate translational restraint.
 - Both readings:
 - Fit the grammar.
 - Fit the context.
 - Make theological sense.
 - This illustrates an important interpretive principle:
 - Theology should not be constructed on genitive ambiguity.
 - The genitive is the most flexible case in Greek.
 - Clear statements and repeated patterns should bear doctrinal weight.
 - Where the grammar allows breadth, the interpreter should resist narrowing the text unnecessarily.

Command Against Disorderly Conduct (3:6–12)

2 Thessalonians 3:6 – Green

- The shift to green indicates instruction written directly to the Thessalonians.
- The passage may be applied today with wisdom.
- It should not be elevated into rigid, universal doctrine.
- Paul speaks with explicit apostolic authority:
 - “We command you.”
 - Issued “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- This command is situational and pastoral, not abstract.
- The instruction is to withdraw from a brother who walks disorderly.
- Withdrawal itself is not inherently wrong.
- However, it is not always the correct response.
- Scripture also commands restoration in appropriate circumstances (Galatians 6:1).
- Discernment is required:
 - Sometimes separation is necessary.
 - Sometimes restoration is the faithful response.
- The standard for disorder is not personal preference.
- It is “the tradition which he received of us.”
- The grammar uses a singular pronoun: “which **he** received.”
- This allows the possibility of a specific individual in view.
- The grammar does not require this conclusion, but it permits it.
- The broader context of the letter makes it plausible.
- This highlights why green-text passages must be handled carefully:
 - Context matters.
 - Grammar matters.
 - Audience matters.
- Textual note:
 - The critical text smooths the reading to “which you received.”
 - The Textus Receptus preserves the more difficult reading.
 - The principle *lectio difficilior potior* favors the harder reading.
- The language sounds personal rather than epistolary.
- Face-to-face instruction is likely in view.

2 Thessalonians 3:7 – Green

- Paul shifts from the singular focus of verse 6 back to the plural “ye.”
- The scope returns to the entire Thessalonian assembly.
- The basis of knowledge here is experiential.
- The Thessalonians personally observed Paul’s conduct.
- Paul appeals to example rather than instruction.
- He asserts that he and his companions did not behave disorderly among them.
- “Disorderly” translates (*ataktos*).
 - Literally “out of order.”
 - Undisciplined.
 - Not fitting the expected arrangement.
- Paul’s conduct matched the demands of the situation.
- It is possible Paul is reusing the word “disorderly” with a shift in emphasis.
- Paul frequently pivots on repeated terms.
- The context suggests the focus is narrowing.
- Economic behavior and responsibility begin to come into view.

2 Thessalonians 3:8–9 – Green

- Paul signals a clear transition with the word “neither.”
- He now addresses a specific form of disorder.
- The issue is economic conduct.
- Paul states that he did not take anyone’s bread without payment.
- This restraint was voluntary, not obligatory.
- Paul acknowledges that he had the right to receive support.
- “Power” refers to legitimate influence and recognized apostolic standing.
- Paul deliberately chose not to exercise that right.
- He labored “with labour and travail night and day.”
- The stated purpose was exemplary:
 - “To make ourselves an ensample unto you.”
- “Ensample” emphasizes a model to be imitated, not merely observed.
- Paul’s life was intended to be copied.
- Historical context is important:
 - Paul’s stay in Thessalonica lasted only three sabbaths (Acts 17:2).
 - His strategy was necessarily short-term and situational.
- This passage does not establish a universal policy for ministry economics.
- It demonstrates the intentional use of personal example to correct emerging disorder in a young congregation.