

2Thessalonians 12-10-26b

2 Thessalonians 3, verse 4 says, And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. We saw in the first session tonight that this chain of confidence and this chain of operation, if you will, begins with the Word of the Lord going forth. It starts with the Word of God.

The energy, the power, the direction, the truth, the substance of this comes from God. And it seems like a simple thing to say, but again, you know what the day is like. You know what it's like when you wake up and you perform your morning ablutions and get ready for whatever it is that's on the schedule for the day and you just get caught up in the momentum of the schedule.

Well, it starts for the believer with the Word of God. And we need a connection with the Lord God of the universe. And that comes through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it is sustained and energized and strengthened and cultivated and developed through the Word of God. That's why you're here. Look at what it says.

Pray for us that the Word of the Lord may run and that it will be glorified. It is to sink into our hearts. It is to make a difference.

It fuels our spiritual life. So that's where it begins. And then we are delivered.

We are supported and we are protected. That's what Paul goes on to say in these next few verses. The Lord is faithful.

He does these things and we have confidence in the Lord in the sphere of the Lord concerning you, Paul says, both that you are doing and will do. You remember all of the previous times he's talked to these people in Thessalonica all the way back in 1 Thessalonians 1, 6-8. You became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction.

With joy of the Holy Spirit, you became examples to everyone in Macedonia and Achaia. From you the Word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out so that we don't need to say anything concerning you.

Remember that? That was in the previous letter. Remember in chapter 2 of that first letter, for this reason we thank God without ceasing, because when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the Word of men, not as science, not as philosophy, but as it is in truth the Word of God. That's 1 Thessalonians 2, 13 and 14.

This is the key. Did you know that while I am talking, the truth that you hear isn't being applied, it's being taken in. It's kind of like the food that you sat down tonight at supper and ate isn't the food that powered you to eat the food, it isn't the food that powered you to get here.

That was previous meals, that was previous metabolized carbohydrates and proteins and fats and so on. Previously you were nourished, previously you were strengthened and that enabled you to sit down and take in more. But if what you took in this evening got thrown up or if it was not digested and metabolized and broken down and made into usable stuff, if it just passed right through your system, it wouldn't do any good.

Think about the truth of the Word of God. It is not enough to be sort of a spiritual bulimic where you take it in and then later you spit it back out again and it doesn't get digested, it doesn't turn into something usable. It doesn't turn into something usable while we are gathered here looking at it together.

This is not the truth in its usable form. Everything that we've gone over tonight, this is not truth in its usable form. When is it going to be usable? When you and I meditate on it, later, when we digest it, when we think, all right, so what? I saw these wonderful things in 2 Thessalonians 3, verses 1 through 5, over this last week.

So what? What is it for me? How can I make use of this? Is there a way that I can lock myself more firmly onto the Word of God? Are there ways that I can appreciate it better? Can I improve the frequency or the quality of my devotional time, my meditation time? Maybe I need to share that time with someone else. Maybe I need to schedule it more rigorously. Maybe I need to think about the way I do it and make it better because everything begins with the Word of God and not here.

Hearing it is great, but hearing it is not metabolizing it. Eating your food is not being powered by it. The Lord Jesus cannot support us and guard us if we do not have His Word abiding in us.

If we are not abiding in the vine, the vine cannot provide us nourishment. We can't be fruitful if we are not abiding. That's why Paul goes on to say, The Lord is faithful who will support you and protect you from the evil one.

We have confidence in the Lord concerning you both that you are doing and will do the things that we command you. This is the necessary condition for Jesus to do His part. He's not going to come and protect and support people that are wandering off, that have no interest in the truth, that aren't glorifying the truth when it runs to them.

Then in verse 5 he says, Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. Now, I'm sorry, but this is where people like my great-great-great-granddad were translating the Scriptures and their choice of words is just not good. We already talked about establish, right? If God establishes a thing, it is fixed and immovable, right? The Lord established, you know, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the worlds and they that dwell therein.

He has established His throne upon the flood. If God establishes His throne, His throne is

unshakable and unmovable, right? Establish is a great word. That's not what sterezo means here.

Sterezo means to hold in place, to lift up, to lash, to support. But it has to be something supportable. You can't... Do you want to try to support jello? Do you want to try to support whipped cream? You can't support that.

You can't mold it into a shape and have it hold. No matter how hard you try, it just doesn't, it won't hold a shape. Well, if God is supporting you, God supports you to the extent that you're willing to avail yourself of that support.

Same thing here. Now, may the Lord direct your hearts. Now, wouldn't this be great if our hearts were directed by God? If God directs an angel to go start a storm or burn down a village or something, the angel's got direction.

That means a command, right? Well, it isn't direct. The best translation here in verse five for this word, which is ketuthani, which is ketuthuno or ketuthaino if you're a stickler for how to transliterate upsilons. But it's ketuthuno.

It doesn't show up in scripture very often. It's only in three times. This means to guide, to guide.

Now, if something is moving, you can guide it. We have guided missiles. Think about a guided missile.

It's a missile, and it's got a guidance system. How much of the propulsion for the missile comes from the guidance system? None. There's a rocket.

There's some sort of gunpowder launch. There's something that got this thing moving, right? It's moving. The guidance system is taking that movement and orienting it, steering it, guide.

You could say, well, you're directing it. A director in a movie tells the actors, the actors are doing the acting and speaking the lines and going through the histrionics and bugging and making faces and strutting and fretting their hour on the stage, and the director is kind of telling them he's guiding them in their performance. And in that sense, you could translate this as direct.

But direct sounds like, well, God is establishing and directing, so it's pretty much a done deal. I'm just going to sit here and let God establish and direct. That's not it.

These words indicate that it is we who are deciding to respond to God's grace, to appreciate God's word, to avail ourselves of God's provision. And when we do that, God supports us and God guides us. But we have to do the walking.

We've got to put the one foot in front of another. And it very much militates against the predestined, decreed, foreordained, foreknown, graven in stone view that, well, everything is going to work out the way God decreed it in eternity past. No, He is going to act in accordance

with His promises for those who respond to His grace.

And He will strengthen, He will support, and He will guide those who are looking for guidance, those who are looking for support and are looking to God for their strength. But we have an active role to play. Now, if things are not going well in our spiritual life, which half of the partnership do you think is not doing their job? What's our memory verse? The Lord's arm is not shortened, that it cannot save.

Neither is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. What's the problem in the partnership? Your iniquities have separated between you and your God. Your sins have hidden His face from you so that He cannot hear, cannot support, cannot guard, cannot strengthen, cannot guide.

If we feel the weight of the struggle, if we feel defeat, if we feel a lack of success, guess who's not stepping up? It's us. The Lord has not failed. The Lord hasn't gotten weary or distracted or busy or wandered off somewhere.

It's us. And we need to take responsibility for ourselves. We need to take a cold, hard look at ourselves and say, I'm not going to do like some political candidates and just find some convenient target to blame.

I'm going to blame something in my periphery. I'm going to blame something in my past. I'm going to blame something somewhere.

We look at others and say, that is a really tacky thing to do to sit there and try to lay blame for stuff that you're accountable for and that in other contexts you claim responsibility for. We've got people who have held office and they say, I'm the responsible one. Well, guess what? You failed.

Your stuff is not working. You failed. So step up and say, I failed.

Don't say, well, it would have worked except that everybody didn't do their part. Nonsense. That's our same logic here.

May the Lord guide your hearts. Why does he say may? He doesn't say the Lord will direct your hearts. He says, may the Lord guide your hearts.

Why does he say that? Because the extent to which we are guided depends on us. The extent to which we are supported depends on us. God's got unlimited support.

God's got unlimited guarding ability. He's got unlimited strength. He's got unlimited guidance.

So where's the limitation? It's me. It's I failing. So may the Lord guide your hearts into what? The love of God and the patience of Christ.

What an interesting conclusion to the thought. Why these particular things? What is the love of God in this context? Is this love for God, love from God? Is the Lord going to direct our hearts into

love for him, for others? How does this work? Keep your finger here and turn back to Romans 5, verse 5. It's a verse we've quoted many times. This goes back to your whole notion of what kind of a genitive is it? Is it an objective genitive or a subjective genitive? Is the love of God love that is sourced in God and expressed from and by God? Or is it objective, love for God? God is the object of the love.

Is God the subject originating the love? Or is he the object receiving the love? Look at Romans 5, 5. Actually, the first five verses. Therefore, having been justified by faith, having been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom, which whom is that? The Lord Jesus Christ. Through whom, i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ, we also have access by faith.

So notice, justified by faith, having been justified by faith, we have access by faith. Now, by faith is one of these theological terms. What does it mean? If tomorrow you're going to have access to God's grace in which we stand, stand firm, stand supported, stand guarded, stand strengthened, stand unmoved, stand guided and directed by God, it's by faith, right? Well, what does by faith mean in the real world, not in the theology book? What does by faith actually mean? What does it mean to stand in God's grace? This is getting done what we're supposed to do as believers in this life.

We're not here to keep the grass green. We're not here to make sure the bills get paid. We're not here to ensure that we finish classes and get our grades, that we accomplish our tasks and get our paycheck, that we raise the kids and pay off the mortgage and swap cars when they get too old.

All of the stuff that seems to be the grist and the substance of our lives, that's not why we're here. Why are we here? Why are we breathing air? Why did Jesus die for us? So that we could learn through this experience of living as human beings in this life about God. If you threw creatures into God's presence with no experience, how could you possibly appreciate and glorify God? Why is it we know so much about God? Why is it that we love him and we're on our knees grateful to him? Why do we appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ? Because we know what sin is.

We know what evil is. We see it in ourselves. We see it in others.

We see it in the world around us. And we have experienced deliverance out of it. We know what good is by contrast with what muck we were dragged out from.

We know what light is because we've been in the darkness. We know what joy is because we know what misery and sorrow are. We know what grace is because we know what it's like to live without it.

And that experience, these lessons, these appreciations, this is why we're here. We are here to learn these things. And this is what we take with us.

We're not taking our silver and gold. We're not taking our house or our car. We're not taking the furniture.

We're not taking our clothes. We're not taking our hair. We're not taking our shoes.

We're not taking anything except what we have learned and specifically what we have learned about God because we're moving into a new realm of civilization and opportunity and function and mission and purpose and plan and activity that we're going to need this knowledge. This is why we're here. So to learn, to rely on, and to be guided by God's truth, to appreciate it and to glorify God through it, to recognize how essential it is for our support, for our protection, for our strengthening, for our guidance, we learn that and we appreciate it in the same way that we learned our mathematics and our English skills as kids and look at the ways we have used it since.

Who doesn't figure their change? Who doesn't check the ticket to be sure that when you hand somebody \$2 and the thing only costs \$1.47, you should be getting 53 cents in change? And you know what two quarters and three pennies looks like. You know this because you have experience. If you have to make change at a yard sale, somebody hands you a 20 and they're buying a \$3 item, how do you know what kind of change to make? Well, because we learned this stuff as children.

We take it for granted that we've got these skills. Do you really want to go to heaven and not be able to make change? Do you want to go to glory and not have any concept, not even know your single digit times tables? Embarrassing. That ye be not ashamed at his coming.

This little section of verses tells us everything we need to know to get the most out of this life and to be ready for the next. And this is what Paul sums up with. He says, finally, brethren, here's what it all boils down to.

Yes, I've told you about the lawless one. Yes, we've talked about the persecution you're going through and that God is going to give them their comeuppance. Yes, in this world you will have tribulation.

Yes, there are going to be people that are going to really have tribulation once we leave. But finally, brethren, here's what it boils down to. It's not about social issues.

It's not about elections. It's not about the economy, stupid. Like they tried to say in the Clinton election, it's not about any of these earthly things.

It is about God. It is about his truth. It is about his son.

It is about his character and the things we learn about those subjects in this life. That's what life is for. That's why we're here.

Inspiring and expiring, inhaling and exhaling. So in Romans chapter five, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. We don't rejoice in possessions.

We don't rejoice in relationships per se, although those are fun and we can enjoy them. Our joy is in hope of the glory of God. Pray that the word will go forth and be glorified.

Not only that, but we also glory in tribulations. Why? This is where we learn. This is where we accomplish our purpose.

The reason for being here is not to hear Handel's Messiah endlessly repeated. Hallelujah, hallelujah. That's not why we're here.

We're here to see the full orb'd expression of God's character. Glory and tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance. We learn application over time.

We learn to stick with it and not fail, not be discouraged, not give up, not throw in the towel. Perseverance leads to character. This is what we take with us into the eternal future.

The character that we build here goes with us. If you learn patience here, if you become strong here, if you are joyful here, if you are optimistic here, if you love the Lord here and love everything that he does and want to be a part of it and want to promote it and encourage it and promulgate it, help his word run, that's character, and that goes forward. And character, hope.

Our character has a purpose. What's the point of learning all kinds of patience and being wonderfully gracious and elegant and admirable and then you die? What good did it do you? You might as well have been a horrible person and had a bunch of fun being nasty to people. Building character inevitably leads us to hope because that character, the purpose for which we formed it is to go forward.

Sometimes the girls and I will sit around and make stuff out of clay and you can do two things once you've made something out of Sculpey. You can put it in the oven and bake it and it becomes permanent. Or you can mash it up and start over.

When Becca makes something, it's beautiful. When Elizabeth makes something, it's beautiful. And we save those things.

I've got little things that Becca made when she was really small. I've got a dad and a girl and the dad's reading a book and the little girl is sitting there and Elizabeth made that a long, long time ago. It's precious, but it's in a fixed form.

It's a permanent thing. When I make something, I look at it and I smile at it and then I mash it up and hand the clay to Rebecca or Elizabeth to make something better. I make these, you know, all of my heads end up looking like Mr. Clean.

They look like the guy on the bleach bottle. But there's two things you can do. You can either mash it up and it has no permanence at all or it carries forward.

Character is permanent with us and it carries forward. So we glory in tribulations knowing that tribulations produce perseverance, produce patience. We stick with it.

We see the long game. We're willing to take a loss. We'll lose a piece here because we're going to win the chess game.

You'll sacrifice a rook if you're going to go down there and checkmate your opponent. Heck, take my queen. Take my queen and while you're busy doing that, I'm going to run my rook down there and trap your king behind his three pawns and you lose.

I'll take the gambit. I'll sacrifice something. I'll go through the tribulation because in Christ we are overcomers.

We are victors. We win. We go forward and that produces character, character, hope.

Hope does not disappoint. Why? Look at verse 5. This is the point, same point that Paul makes in 2 Thessalonians 3. Hope does not disappoint because the love of God, very same phrase, love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Is it love for God? Is it love from God for others? Yes, all of the above.

The love of God is omnidirectional. God loves His Son. God loves His Holy Spirit.

God loves His angels. God loves us. The unfallen angels love God.

The Holy Spirit loves the Father. The Father loves the Son. The Son loves the Spirit.

The Son loves the Father. We love all three members of the Trinity. All three members of the Trinity love us.

We love one another. The love of God, you can't contain it down and make a flashlight out of it. It's a beacon.

It's like a glowing flame on top of the Olympic torch. It goes in all directions. You can't say, well, it's love for God or love from God.

It's always going to be all of those things. The love of God is always in every direction. So the love of God is poured out in our hearts.

Does it mean we love God more? Yes. Does it mean we love each other more? Yes. Does it mean that God loves us more? Yes.

All of the above. It's all of that. The same thing in 2 Thessalonians 3. May the Lord guide your

hearts into the love of God, that omnidirectional love, and into the perseverance, the patience of Christ.

Why did Jesus endure the cross and despise the shame? For the hope that was set before Him. You have need of endurance. You have need of patience.

So that after the tribulation, you receive the inheritance. You receive the reward. All of these things are symmetrical.

They align. The things that we've seen in book after book, chapter after chapter, verse after verse. Well, this brings us to verse 6 where we'll begin next time.

Once again, we have this word command. We command you. Now we're going to have some explicit guidance.

We talked about how the Lord would guide us, how He would support us, He would guard us. Well, and that we have to enter into that for it to work, to be effective. Well, here are going to be some commands.

How do you ensure that we're in the place to be supported and guided and strengthened and all of the above? Follow the commands. Be obedient. And we're going to get a set of those starting in verse 6. Let's close here for tonight in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word and how clear and explicit the laying out of your plan and purpose for us is within these pages. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will enliven it and impress it on our hearts, that our meditation on it will be fruitful and guide us to application and implementation in our day, in our decisions, in our thoughts, in what we choose to invest our time in, so that as we draw closer to the time when the Lord Jesus returns for us, we will be more fully equipped and more fully prepared for every good work. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.