

Persevere in Goodness

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- [0 : 0 0] We're going to dive straight in and chapter 3 of 2 Thessalonians, when I first read it in preparation for this sermon, I thought, has Malcolm Turnbull written this?
- Because this looks like the Liberal Party manifesto. It says things like, keep away from unemployed dole bludgers. There's unionized labor, my goodness. Work hard, those unwilling to work shall not eat. Earn your own keep and all that.
- I thought, what is going on here? Who wrote this? And it would be very easy to preach this passage about random moralism of working hard, paying your own way.
- And at the end of the talk, instead of the prayer, I'd have to say, spoken by V. Henderson, Liberal Party Doncaster, or something like that. And so it's a very tricky passage, and it seems to come out of nowhere, given everything we've said so far in this really terrific letter.
- But in order to understand this passage, you have to be clear about the difference between a sickness and a symptom. A sickness and a symptom. And I've put that at the top of your handout.
- [1 : 0 8] So to dive straight in, verses 6 and 14, they make it clear what the sickness is. So verse 6, Verse 14, You see, the main sickness in the Thessalonian church The sickness in the Thessalonian church is gullible disobedience.
- And I put that at the top of your handout. So gullibly believing lies about Jesus and his return, rather than obeying true teaching.
- That is the sickness in this church. And we said that Paul's teaching was the Jewish scriptures and his own testimony about Jesus. So the Jewish scriptures, the Old Testament.
- The testimony about Jesus, the New Testament. Paul's teaching is the Old and New. It is the Bible. The Bible is the truth we need to stand in, in a city full of lies.
- And the lie going around their city, as we said last week, was that Jesus had already returned. Some gullible Christians believed this lie.
- [2 : 4 6] We'll see them a little bit later. But Paul teaches the truth. He says, no, no, Jesus is still on the way. You must persevere until that day comes.
- And by the time you get to the end of this fantastic little letter, we realize that God has given the ancient Christians, and us modern ones, everything we need to persevere until the day the Lord Jesus returns.
- And so my aim for this final sermon is that we would live according to Paul's true teaching and keep away from Christians who don't.
- I'm going to say that again. My aim is that we would live according to Paul's true teaching and keep away from Christians who don't. And so I'm sure most of you have your Bibles open.
- Thank you. That would really help me. And the handout is there that has some points detailing where I'm going this morning. So point number one. In a letter that encourages perseverance, I count seven prayers in three short chapters.

- [3 : 54] And I think what Paul is saying is that in a letter full of perseverance, it feels impossible. Without the Lord's help, perseverance feels impossible.
- And maybe as we've worked our way through this letter, you felt the challenge of standing up for Jesus, wherever you find yourself, Monday to Saturday, feels impossible.
- Maybe holding fast to the Bible's teaching whilst living in this city that thinks Christians are bigoted dinosaurs, feels impossible. We talked about Margaret Court's example.
- Paul's reaction to the seemingly impossible task of persevering for the Lord in this city is prayerful dependence on the Lord.
- And our passage begins with another call to prayer. So in verse one, Paul says his job is to spread the name of the Lord. In verse two, he says his workplace environment is wicked and evil and unfaithful is the language.
- [5 : 00] An impossible job unless he depends on the Lord. So verse one, pray that the Lord will spread his word. That's Paul's work.
- Verse two, pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people. That is for safety. And when it comes to the Thessalonians, listen out for the Lord at work.
- I'll read verse three and five, three to five. Listen out for the Lord at work. But the Lord is faithful and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.
- We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and into Christ's perseverance.
- Does wicked or evil or unfaithful describe your Monday to Saturday? Is your environment where you find yourself?
- [5 : 59] Maybe it's your workplace or your neighborhood. Would you be able to describe that as wicked and evil and unfaithful? You know, this city, Melbourne, it's been awarded the most livable city since Adam was a boy.
- I can't remember a time we've ever lost that title. I don't know what we're doing, but maybe we should keep doing it. But actually, it's a city full of disobedience to the Bible's teaching.
- It's full of lies about Jesus and his return. Contrary to popular opinion, as far as God is concerned, this is a wicked city, isn't it? And so if we are to go about our lives in this city while we wait for the Lord to return, we need to be strengthened and protected from the lies of the evil one.
- They stop us persevering. He is a faithful Lord, says verse 3. Let that motivate us to come to him.
- It says in verse 5, He can direct our hearts into God's love and a Christ-like perseverance. Let that motivate us to ask him for help when we're outside this safe HTD bubble.
- [7 : 18] We had the Kingdom Growth Night this past Wednesday night. That is where we... It's like a church family prayer night. And there were 42 people there.
- Normally there's about 70 or so. And that's pretty good. That many people praying. But I wonder, in a church this size, if that's not so great, that only 42 people were praying, or even 70 as normal.
- And so, permission to gently challenge us this morning. Could we please put our Kingdom Growth Nights in our diaries?
- I made a mistake on the handout. The next one is Wednesday the 6th of September. Wednesday the 6th of September. It's always the first Wednesday of the month.
- But we've got a different event this coming first Wednesday in August. So, Wednesday the 6th of September. And I know that we're all busy.

[8 : 20] There's no doubt about it. I know lots of us have very specific reasons why we can't make it. That's no problem. But for the vast majority of us, God works as His people pray.

I was talking to a lady in the previous service, and she said she's a bit nervous to pray publicly. But that's okay. Even if you turn up, other people would still be encouraged by your presence.

Wednesday the 6th of September for 45 minutes, 7.30pm. Let's pray as a church family. If this letter shows anything, it is the impossibility of persevering in a city like this one.

We must be asking the Lord's help. He is faithful, it says. He can direct our hearts. He is sovereign and powerful. He knows what it's like to persevere himself.

We only need to ask for His help. God works as His people pray. And the other way the Lord helps us to persevere is to give us the right teaching to follow.

[9 : 28] And this is our second point. So from verse 7, For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. Paul says that his example shows he is living as if Jesus is still on the way.

He is living according to the truth, not like those gullible disobedient Christians who are living according to the lie that He's already come. He goes on in verse 7.

We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling, so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this not because we don't have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.

It seems in verse 8 that Paul didn't want to burden the church by asking them for room and board. Clearly he believes persevering is the bigger burden the church needs to be worried about.

But these gullible disobedient Christians, they think there's no greater burden for the church than providing them with three square meals. Now, just as a quick caveat, the church is and should be the authentic community in the world.

[10 : 54] We should all be sharing with one another when no one is in need, says the book of Acts. And so relying on HTD and HTD family for support is perfectly biblical.

This passage is not speaking about that legitimate circumstance. Rather, Paul is contrasting himself, who goes above and beyond, to shoulder the burden of perseverance by not draining resources in a way, with those who abuse the kindness of church and its family.

Paul is modelling an example for all Christians that we should all help the church to shoulder its burden of perseverance. Now, shouldering the burden, that will look different in a lot of circumstances.

So I'm just going to name a few. It could be increasing financial giving. It could be starting to financially give. See, this helps pay for ministry staff and buildings.

This enables the true teaching that we can stand firm in. During the past few weeks when I've been working on these sermons, I've been working out of the small room near the main office.

[12 : 08] And during the week, there are so many people who come into this building to do various bits and bobs. All these behind-the-scenes work, it's incredible the amount of people that do it.

And all of this work is so necessary, and it enables Andrew Price and Mark Chew to get on with the main job of proclaiming the truth so we can stand firm in it.

Shouldering the burden could be leading a small group Bible study if you have the gifting. It could be joining a small group Bible study. It would mean spending time over a cup of tea, asking how someone's Christian life is going.

It could mean going into full-time ministry if you have the gifting. And we could go on and on and on. There are so many ways that we all can help the church shoulder this burden of persevering until the Lord returns.

And so I put that as a question at the bottom of our handouts. What could you do to help the HCD family shoulder its perseverance burden? I think that's the model that Paul lays down for us in his above and beyond work attitude for the church.

[13 : 24] But now let's turn to look at those who weren't helping the church shoulder its burden, and this is our last point. So verse 11. We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive.

They're not busy. They are busy bodies. Remember, idleness is merely a symptom of a deeper sickness of gullible disobedience. And the way it works, I think, is this.

So if I gullibly believed that Jesus had already returned and that I wasn't swept up in his rescue in heaven but was down here freezing on a Sunday morning and suffering in church, what would be the point of anything anymore?

Nothing has value now. And I can assure you that I certainly wouldn't turn up for my 6am shift tomorrow morning at Woolies, which is actually true, by the way.

And after all, I'm part of HTD. You're a lovely church family. You'll pay my room and board, won't you? You're Christians after all. If Jesus has already returned and I've missed the boat, what is the point?

[14 : 33] And I think that is how the idleness works in this chapter. Remember, Christians are gullibly believing that lie that he's already come.

And I think the idleness is that outward sign that rather than hold fast to the true teaching, they're believing lies. And Deuteronomy 30, that was our first Old Testament reading, that shows that disobedience to true teaching and believing lies has always been a sickness that has plagued God's people, even to the time of ancient Israel.

And it's worth saying as well, please note that idleness is not speaking about unemployed people who are looking for work, nor is it talking about stay-at-home parents who look after the kids, or grandparents who look after kids.

My mum will tell you that that is work. All of these things are really, really godly, are really, really necessary. Nor is idleness speaking about retired persons who for personal circumstances are less able to work like they did when they were younger.

The language of verse 10 is someone unwilling to work. There's nothing wrong with them, but where Paul cares about shouldering the church's responsibility and not burdening the church, this person abuses the kindness of the church.

[16 : 06] Idleness is a symptom, the deepest sickness, disobeying true teaching, believing the lies of the world. And so the symptoms of this sickness, while it was idleness in the Thessalonian church, it might very well be selfishness and sexual immorality of the Corinthians.

It might be the arrogance or the infighting of the Philippians. It might be the unwholesome talk and the lack of love of the Ephesians. And it might be the individualism and selfishness materialism of the Melburnians.

All are symptoms of a deeper sickness. And the problem with this particular sickness is that it is a contagious disease.

I'm a parent now and I can assure you there are few crimes greater in Australia than taking your sneezing, coughing toddler to kindergarten. Parents are furious that their own children will get infected.

And I think that's what explains Paul's attitude here. He's desperate that his own children, his own church will not get infected either. Keep away is the language in verse 6.

[17 : 28] Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instructions. In verse 14, they have the plague. Do not associate with them. They have an infectious disease.

Says Paul. And I think that explains the seriousness of his tone in verse 6. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, he says. Their gullible disobedience is an infectious disease to the rest of the church.

Remember the Thessalonians? They were a tiny church. They were beset by disasters on all fronts. Outside, there was physical violence by those loyal to Caesar.

Inside, there are lies things about Jesus' return. If this church is going to make it until that final day, everyone needs to be helping out. Everyone needs to be shouldering the burden of perseverance.

Even God was working as we saw in our first point. Perseverance is a team effort. The tricky thing comes though from this passage, from these commands of keep away and not associating with.

[18 : 39] I think they're tricky commands for us to follow and the reason why is because HTD is a slightly different church to the Thessalonian church.

So they met in tiny little house churches and they were right in each other's lives because of the violence outside. They would have depended on one another for physical safety.

But we live most of our Christian lives away from one another out there. It's really hard to know whether people are believing the lies. And so it might be easier if we apply this not to HTD individuals but to HTD activities.

We see them here in the buildings. And here's the thing. All church activities start with the very best of intentions.

Some are therefore teaching so the Sunday services. Some are there just for fellowship so coffees and teas and lunches. All of these are necessary to help us persevere.

[19 : 48] And so it's worth testing whether well-intentioned activities are still helping us to persevere or whether they're hindering us.

I put that at the bottom of your handout and let me give you a few examples to illustrate what I'm talking about. So I spent the last 10 years living in London with my wife and there used to be these Christian holidays you could go on.

You could do Holy Land tours or skiing holidays and there are places where Christians could go on holiday with other like-minded Christians for fellowship. Really great well-intentioned initiative.

And my buddies and I a few years ago we went on a ski holiday to France and what actually happened was this ski holiday turned out to be a drinking holiday. And in that case my buddies and I we had to distance ourselves from the mob.

Keep away says Paul. Don't associate with them thanks but no thanks is the attitude we should adopt. There were these Christian singles events put on.

[20 : 54] Again really well-intentioned the idea being you know it's better for Christians not to find a partner in a sleazy bar amongst people who could lead them away from the Lord.

Really well-intentioned but actually these nights ended up turning into the sleazy nights they were trying to avoid where even Christians were leading other Christians astray.

Keep away says Paul. Don't associate with them. Thanks but no thanks. And I'm sure over the years you all must have heard of the small group Bible study that has two minutes of Bible and 58 minutes of gossiping about other people or talking about material house prices share portfolio prices things like that.

How are these groups still helping to persevere? It seems more of a hindrance. And we've talked they're all sort of activities of the church but it could be that you know of individuals who are no longer that is individual Christians who are no longer obeying the Bible's teaching but believing the lies of the world instead.

It could mean with regards to your regular catch-ups with them that you have to keep away. Paul says don't associate with them.

[22 : 21] They have an infectious disease. Now that would mean for an individual that would mean a conversation. You'd have to explain why you're keeping away not just not turn up one day.

But I think the test for individuals and for all church activities is this and I put it on your handouts. Is this activity or Christian friendship still helping others to persevere until Jesus returns?

Or is it hindering them? There are quite a few groups that I know of here at HTD that are really top notch. So there's a men's connect group that was started by a few men who wanted to take the lead in godliness.

That's fantastic. There's a mums group on Friday morning. There is a ladies, I guess it's quilt making group on Friday mornings as well.

Do you know on Wednesdays there's a working bee that happens with a few guys from here. One hour of work and some chat over coffee afterwards.

[23 : 27] Fantastic stuff. Young adults Bible study. Brilliant. This passage says it would not be too religiously boring or intense to ask, is this activity still helping Christians to persevere?

Or is it hindering them? You see, Paul's strategy of keeping away and not associating is not so these people will leave HTD or these activities will end, but rather that they would be reformed and made healthy again.

Verse 12, such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. He's not banishing them from HTD. He'd rather they reform and settle down, be made healthy.

Verse 14, do not associate with them in order that they may feel ashamed. Paul wants to shame these people or these activities into reform, that they be made healthy again.

people. He wants spiritually sick people and activities to once again help people to persevere as they did when they started.

[24 : 49] Remember that these groups and these people are Christian. That's important. Verse 15, do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.

But if these groups or these individuals won't fall back into line under the authority of the apostle, then they are showing that inner sickness, that disobedience to true teaching, and that belief and acceptance of outside lies.

Do not associate with them, says Paul. Keep away. Thanks, but no thanks, is the language. And so that is to Thessalonians.

That is, I think it's a gem of a book, a tiny book, a big message about persevering until the Lord returns. And if I could just put one more application on you, now that we've studied the book together, could you go away and read it for yourself or perhaps with a young one?

And the reason why is that once you've got some teaching on a book, you understand a bit about what the passage is doing now, when you read it for yourself, you'll find the words to become so much more three-dimensional.

[26 : 03] The text will lift up off the page now that you've got some teaching on it, and you will see things for yourself that we missed, and you will better understand some things that we already talked about.

And I hope that when you do, you will realise that God has given, in this tiny book, a full medicine cabinet of everything we need to persevere until the Lord returns.

So, chapter one, keep growing as a Christian, even in the face of persecution. Jesus' return will liberate you and judge your enemies. Keep persevering.

Chapter two, don't believe the lies out there that Jesus will never return. Stand firm to the truth. He's still on his way. Keep persevering.

And today, obey true teaching from Paul and from the Bible. Keep away from Christians who don't. They have an infectious disease.

[27 : 04] Keep persevering. And so, let me finish by borrowing some of Paul's words to pray. Our Father God, may the Lord of peace himself give us peace at all times and in every way, particularly with this tricky job of persevering.

We praise you, Lord Jesus, that you will return to liberate and vindicate us. We praise you that you are faithful and you will strengthen us and protect us from the evil one.

Help us to keep doing the things the Bible commands of us, even in this wicked city. And we pray, Lord Jesus, that you would direct our hearts into God's love and into a Christ-like perseverance.

And we ask it for your name's sake. Amen.