The Pastor's Desire for His People
2 Thessalonians 3:1-5
53-13

Let's open our Bibles this morning to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, as we continue in our study of Paul's second letter to this beloved church. I want us, this morning, to look together at verses 1 through 5, 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 verses 1 through 5.

"Finally, brethren, pray for us that the Word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men, for not all have faith, but the Lord is faithful and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ."

If I were to title this particular text, I would simply title it, "What the Pastor Desires from His People." It's just a little interlude, really, in this letter in which the heart of Paul is made manifest. It's very tender. It's very personal. It is Paul saying this is what I expect from you, this is what I cherish in terms of your Christian conduct.

Obviously the expectation of the people toward the pastor is very high. That is usually the case. Today, any day, in the history of the church, anyone who steps into the role of pastor, elder, shepherd of the sheep, anyone who, as it were, ascends to the pulpit and preaches the Word of God and sets himself forth as the example for the flock, has to fit, as it were, a very high standard. And the people have every right to hold the pastor to that standard.

We say that being a pastor, being the shepherd of the flock of God is the highest calling. Not only is it the highest in the terms of privilege, but it has to be the highest in the terms of responsibility or obligation also. We have to give an account to God for how we have served in this unique calling. It's the most serious task that any man could ever be given. It has the greatest potential for good and the greatest potential for harm. That's why a severer judgment is set for those who teach the Word and defect.

You have every right as a congregation to hold me to the high standard the Word of God lays out, and all your pastors. And there is very much in the Word to help you define our duty. In fact, what the Word says is absolutely clear and very precise. In John 21, Jesus said to Peter, "Feed My sheep, tend My sheep, feed My sheep." In Acts chapter 6, we find that those who lead the church are responsible to give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word. In Acts chapter 20 we are reminded to declare the whole counsel of God, to take heed to our own virtue and our own life purity and then to the flock of God over which we've been made overseers to feed the flock of God.

In 1 Corinthians 4 it is said that we are servants of God and we are stewards of the divine mysteries and someday God, who knows the secrets of every heart, is going to reveal the true quality of our service. In 1 Timothy chapter 3 it is said that we are to be blameless, that we are to be one-woman men, that we are to be temperate in life, that we are to have families that manifest godliness and submission. We find that in 1 Timothy chapter 4 it outlines for us the responsibility to warn our people of error, to be nourished up on the words of the faith and sound doctrine, to give little attention to physical matters and great attention to godliness. It reminds us that we are to be an example to the flock in every aspect of life, that we are to teach the Word of God continually, and that we are to be careful to let our spiritual progress be demonstrated to everyone.

In 1 Timothy chapter 6, we are reminded that we have been entrusted with a treasure, that treasure is the Word of God, and we are to be sure to protect and proclaim that treasure faithfully. In 2 Timothy chapter 4, we are reminded that we are to preach the Word and be instant in season and out of season, no matter how much resistance there might be we are to reprove and rebuke and exhort with all long suffering, and we are to do it even in a time when people with itching ears will want to hear people say something other than we are mandated to say.

We are reminded also in Titus chapter 1, that we are to be above reproach and there is to be nothing in our lives that brings any stain on the cause of Christ. As if that's not enough, Peter tells us in his first epistle chapter 5 that we are to be the under-shepherds of Christ, never to lord it over the flock and never to do what we do for money.

The duty then of the shepherd is clear. The duty of the pastor is precise. And because of the precision and clarity of that, much is made of our obligation to fulfill our duty. And we are rightly to be held up to that high standard. And we are rightly to be disqualified if we fall short of it.

But there's another side to this responsibility between pastor and people and that's your side. I believe Scripture is equally clear on the duty and obligation and responsibility of the people to the shepherd. I have a serious and demanding and formidable duty before God to fulfill on your behalf, but you have a serious, demanding, formidable duty to fulfill on my behalf. As I have a ministry to you, you have a ministry to me. As you have, and rightly so, certain desires for me, I have and rightly so, certain desires for you. In fact, Scripture has much to say about your responsibility to your pastor.

In Hebrews chapter 13, you are told to remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you and considering the result of their conduct, to imitate their faith. In verse 17 of that same chapter, "You are to obey your leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable to you." You're to be submissive and obedient and follow the pattern that your pastor sets. Why? In order that you might give him joy in his ministry, for if he has no joy, you won't either. When the pastor fulfills his responsibility, the people fulfill their responsibility, that mutual responsibility then makes the church what God wants it to be, effective and blessed.

You surely remember in our study of 1 Thessalonians some months back, chapter 5 verses 12 and 13 of which I briefly remind you, "That we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction." He says appreciate your pastors, your elders. And then in verse 13, "Esteem them very highly in love." Not because of their personality, not because of their winsomeness, but because of their work. It is not a subjective affection, it is an objective one. It is not because we are so lovable. It is because of the

task that we do. It is so important.

So you are told to imitate the faith of your leader, to follow him, submit to him, to honor, respect, love, support, appreciate. And as I said, when pastor and people mutually fulfill those precise and clear instructions, the church is powerful, and the church is blessed.

This very issue, I believe, of what the pastor desires from the people, is on the heart of Paul in this text. As he writes these five verses, almost a little interlude sandwiched into this epistle, he shares his heart for the people. It's always pretty clear to him what they want from him. Here he wants to make it clear to them what he wants from them. He knew what they wanted, they asked questions. Their puzzles were proposed to him for his solutions. Their queries needed his responses. Their struggles needed his insight. And their distress needed his wisdom. And we watch him as he moves through the book of Acts, as he writes his epistles, as he responds to what he knows his people want from him.

But here's a little window that shows us what he wants from his people. And you can feel the shepherd's heart as he expresses it in these verses. Basically, there are four desires that he has. They're very simple, very direct. They are the spiritual activities that he expects his people to engage in. They're his expectations and desires for the flock God has given him.

The first one, he desires that they be prayerful. He desires that they be prayerful. "Finally, brethren," verse 1, "pray for us." The shepherd wants the prayers of his people. Now think about it for a moment. Paul was without equal as a gifted, powerful, competent, effective minister. He had immense natural abilities, brilliant, logical, persuasive, erudite, educated, trained, religious, spiritually minded, perceptive, experienced. He had it all. But all that natural ability and all that education and all that religious training and all that experience and all of that skill, highly developed through the years, was not the source of his great power and it was not the source of his usefulness. It was the power of God at work in him that transcended his natural giftedness; that made him the man that he was for divine purposes. He himself confessed in Colossians 1 verse 29, "I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." He had no confidence in his flesh. And he knew that whatever success he had was not related to his natural giftedness or any of those things which had occurred in his life on the human level, but to the very power of God surging through him. He was dependent on the Lord entirely for every aspect of his ministry. He even said, "Nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me." He knew where his power source was.

And consequently there are frequent pleas for his people to pray for him. And those pleas underline and underscore how strongly he leaned on divine power. I sometimes think that those in ministry who are least naturally gifted make get the most prayer because people assume that naturally gifted people don't need any. Nothing could be further from the truth. There may be greater temptation for those more gifted to trust in their own giftedness. There may be greater possibility for human ingenuity to take over for the power of God in the unusually gifted than in those who are more humbly gifted. Thus those with the greater gifts may be those with the greatest need for prayer.

The Thessalonians obviously were the object of his prayers. He prayed for them in chapter 1 verse 11, "To this end also we pray for you always." He prayed for them in chapter 2 verse 16, "Now may 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." He was used to praying for them. We all know that in all of his epistles he loved to say that he was

continually in prayer for his people. He knew the Thessalonians in particular were facing severe trials. In fact, their trials were so severe they actually thought they were in the Day of the Lord, which is the final eschatological Day of Judgment. It was that severe. Some of their lives may have well been in danger and so he knew they needed his prayers. Also they were weak. They were brand new in Christ. They had only been saved, by the time he wrote this letter, a matter of a few months. These weak Christians certainly needed the strong prayers of Paul.

But wonderfully it was also true that Paul needed their intercession. His was also a hard life. He also knew the meaning of persecution. He faced difficulty. He faced a solitary life. He faced danger constantly. He usually was self-supporting, usually had to preach to people who didn't want to hear what he said in places where he never was invited to start with. Life for him was one unending challenge and the threat of death was imminent. He bore in his body the marks of Jesus Christ. He faced death on a daily basis. And he knew he couldn't succeed in his own human flesh and he was dependent upon the power of the Lord and he knew that power was released through the prayers of his people. And so in verse 1 he says, "Finally, brethren..."

Just a note on the word "finally." Somebody is going to say, "Why does he say finally and then go on for 18 verses? Sounds like the pastor." Well the word “finally” can mean this is the end, it can have the note of finality, *loipos*, but it literally means "for the rest." Or you could translate it, "besides that," which is how it's used in 1 Corinthians 1:16. It may but doesn't have to mean the end has come. He uses the same term in the third chapter of Philippians verse 1, the same term in the fourth chapter of 1 Thessalonians and in both cases he's not near the end yet. He's simply making a transition and saying, "Besides that, this." Or, "For the rest of the space, this is what I'm going to talk about." Several places, including Philippians 3:1 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1, it marks a transition from the doctrinal content of the book to the practical, and that is the case here as well. He finishes up with the great doctrinal section there at the end of chapter 2, having discussed those eschatological things related to the return of Jesus Christ, the Day of the Lord and the rapture, and now he moves for the rest into the practical agenda. And it gets very practical.

Then he says, "Brethren, pray for us." I don't want to belabor the point, it's obvious. Just to say a couple of things, the word "pray" is in the present tense. It means "continually pray and make this a constant pattern," and that's fitting with 1 Thessalonians 5:17 where he said, "Pray without ceasing" should be the pattern of the Christian's life. But the little phrase "for us," *peri*, *peri* is the preposition. It means around, pray around us, surround us with your continual prayers, surround us with your continual intercession. Here the most spiritually strong man used by God above other men shows his meekness and humility, listen, by asking for the prayers of the weakest of saints. That ought to tell you something about prayer. The strongest prays for the weakest and the weakest pray for the strongest.

This is a good reminder that even the weakest Christian, even a new believer, walking in the Spirit, that new believer has the privilege of tapping God's power through prayer on behalf of the strongest representatives of the kingdom of God. Sometimes people say, "Well I'm not anybody important, I'm a relatively new Christian, I don't know much. What can I do that's significant in the advancement of the kingdom?"

I'll tell you what you can do, you can pray so that God's power falls upon His anointed servants who can then preach and minister with great power. That's your part. Here was the apostle's true greatness, preeminently gifted walking in God's power, yet deeply conscious of his own personal

inadequacy and dependent upon the prayers of his friends. He may have had to rebuke them, as he does in chapter 3 verses 6 and following. We'll see that later in the summer. He may have had to rebuke them. They may not have been perfect. But they had access because they were brethren, they had access to the throne of the almighty God and their prayers could result in his power.

Now he has two things that he wants them to pray about. One, that the Word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, that the Word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified. He wants them to pray for the success of the message, for the success of the message. That phrase "the Word of the Lord" is used several hundred times in the Scripture. It is repeated over and over in the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament. It simply refers to that which is revealed by God, divine revelation. He's already used it once in the first epistle to the Thessalonians when he said in chapter 4 verse 15, "This we say to you by the Word of the Lord." And then he goes on to describe the rapture. The Word of the Lord is divine revelation which now is inscripturated for us. So he's saying pray that God's revelation, the divine Word, will succeed, that it will spread rapidly and be glorified.

Now just a note. In the New Testament, when you see the phrase "the Word of the Lord," it is most frequently associated with the gospel, because the gospel is the initial point at which the Word of the Lord opens up. It doesn't do me any good, or anybody else for that matter, to teach a non-believer who has not accepted the gospel the rest of the Word of the Lord because they don't have the apparatus to receive it, do they? So very often in the New Testament, “the Word of the Lord" is synonymous with the gospel. You'll find that in Acts 8, 13, 15, in Acts 16 and Acts 19. The Word of the Lord, first of all, comes in the form of the saving message of Jesus Christ. So he's saying then, pray that the gospel, that first basic entrance of the Word of the Lord, may move rapidly and be glorified. His passion was for the truth. His passion was for the gospel. His passion was for all of the Word of God to enter in after the gospel had penetrated and initiated the entrance. Pray for the success of the message.

Any preacher would ask this. Any pastor would ask this. When you pray for me, pray for the success of the message as it goes out in the church, as it goes out on tape, as it goes out on radio, as it goes out in a book, wherever. Wherever I may go in the world to preach, pray for the success of the message. Pray that God's Word, he says, may spread rapidly. The Greek verb *trechō* means literally “to run.” Pray that the Word may run. He's borrowing this concept, shows his knowledge of the Old Testament, from Psalm 147:15 where it says, "God's Word runs very swiftly." So he says pray that the Word will run like a powerful runner, like a strong runner moving unobstructed and unhindered, making rapid progress.

This is always on his heart because he lives for the preaching of the Word of God. He lives for the success of his message. Back in Ephesians chapter 6, verse 18 he says, "Pray at all times." Then in verse 19 he says, "Pray that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel of which I am an ambassador."

So when you pray that the message may succeed, you have to pray that the messenger will be faithful to open his mouth, that he'll make known clearly the mysteries of the gospel. In Colossians also, in chapter 4, something of the same request comes out of his heart, verse 2, "Devote yourselves to prayer," verse 3, "Praying at the same time for us that God may open up to us a door for the Word so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ for which I have also been imprisoned." Then he adds, "In order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak."

Pray that the Word will go rapidly. Pray that when I'm given opportunity I'll open my mouth. Pray that when I'm ready to open my mouth God will open a door so I can speak, and then when I get the opportunity, pray that I'll say what needs to be said; always asking the church to pray for the success and the spread of the message.

In 2 Timothy 2:9 he reminded young Timothy the Word of God is not bound. I might be; it isn't. Pray that it will move powerfully through the land.

And then he adds this, "And be glorified," and be glorified. What does that mean? It simply means appreciated, honored, respected, extolled, admired. He's simply saying that it will be received with a proper response, that people will hear the gospel and they will affirm it to be the gospel, the saving truth. He's talking about acceptance.

Back in Acts chapter 13 and verse 44 through 49, we get a picture of what he's got in mind. Verse 44 of Acts 13: "The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the Word of God. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy." Obviously they didn't like Christianity being more popular than Judaism. "They began contradicting the things spoken by Paul and they were blaspheming. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the Word of God should be spoken to you first. Since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles."

Look, he says, you're not going to listen, you're going to repudiate it, we're going to turn away from you. He was used to having the gospel repudiated. He was used to having the gospel blasphemed.

"But when he went to the Gentiles," verse 48, "they began rejoicing." Here's the phrase, "and glorifying the Word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed and the Word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region." This is exactly what Paul wants the Thessalonians to pray for.

What had happened in that 13th chapter of Acts is what he wanted to happen. What had happened in that area of Galatia where the Word went and it was resisted and rejected by the Jews but it turned to the Gentiles and it spread rapidly and people were glorifying it; that is, they were accepting it and they were believing, it is what he wanted the Thessalonians to pray would happen again. In fact, just to remind them of how that was, he adds at the end of verse 1, "Just as it did also with you." You know how it was when it came to you. In Acts chapter 17 the record is given of what happened in Thessalonica. Paul came there with Silas and he preached about Christ. You remember again that he was in the synagogue of the Jews and he was reasoning with them. Verse 4: "Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women." And it was only after that that some Jews rebelled.

The initial entrance of the gospel the Jews believed, the Gentiles believed, the gospel moved with power. He says I want to see that same thing happen again. And it was so real in Thessalonica. Do you remember back in the first letter, chapter 1 verse 5, he says "Our gospel didn't come to you in word only but in power in the Holy Spirit with full conviction." Verse 6: "You became imitators of us and of the Lord." Verse 7: "You became an example to all the believers." Verse 8: "The Word of the Lord has sounded forth from you." Verse 9: "You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and wait for His Son from heaven." Boy, they had a genuine response to the gospel. So he is

saying, "Will you please pray for me? Will you pray that the message will have success, the same kind it had with you, where it moves rapidly and is honored and glorified and received and believed in?"

An interesting note, as he writes this he's in the city of Corinth. Things haven't gone well. The 18th chapter of Acts records what was going on in the city of Corinth and as I said, it wasn't good. There was a hostile reaction to the gospel. Chapter 18, verse 6 tells us the Jews resisted and blasphemed and he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads, I'm clean. From now on I go to the Gentiles." He hit a stone wall there, not like Thessalonica, not like Galatia. And so he is in...in the context of that resistance as he writes. I believe that he wrote this letter some time after that initial resistance and he wants the gospel to break through, to really break through, and so he says, "Will you please pray that it will spread rapidly and be accepted?"

There's a second thing he asks in verse 2. "And that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men for not all have faith." What is this?

First he asks for the success of the message. Secondly: The safety of the messengers. "That we may be delivered," *rhuomai*, rescued, saved. "Not for self-preservation alone, not for personal comfort or safety alone, but because if we're not protected then the message won't be heard. Pray that the message will go forth successfully and the messengers will be unhindered. Paul was always facing hostility. We've already read about it in the book of Acts. I can remind you at the end of Romans 15, he says, "Pray for me that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient," disobedient to God. Pray for me that I'll be able to carry on my ministry.

In Corinth, as I said, there was tremendous resistance. And perhaps after he wrote this letter it really blew sky-high because in Acts 18 verse 12 it says, "Gallio was proconsul of Achaia. The Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat." The whole Jewish population were united in hostility against the gospel and they made an issue out of it. They even took, in verse 17, Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, began beating him in front of the judgment seat. A riot really ensued. Paul is in the context of this resistance and he's pleading with them to pray for the success of the message and the safety of the messenger.

Now would you note also that he identifies who is dangerous: Perverse and evil men. “Perverse” literally is the word "out of place." This is the only time in the New Testament it's used of a person. It's always used of some object that got lost, something that's out of its proper place, something improper. Here it means some person who is out of his proper place, who is perverse, unrighteous; one writer says "morally insane." And then he adds evil, malignant aggressive wickedness. Pray for us that we will be rescued from the threats and the power of morally insane, perverse, aggressively wicked people who want to shut our mouths so the message can't be preached. Pray for us.

I would echo that. Pray for the success of the message as I preach and pray for safety and security for the messenger. Maybe the persecution isn't the same today as it was then, but it's still out there.

And then he adds a note of explanation, "For not all have faith." The Thessalonians probably assumed that because they responded in such a wonderful way, because the Jews and the Gentiles together responded to the gospel, that this might be the norm. Now remember, Paul had just been with them a matter of really just a few months, weeks. And they probably thought their response

would kind of be the pattern and he says to them, "Pray regarding this hostility because not all have faith." It is possible to interpret that two ways. Some might say, "Not all have the faith," the definite article being there, talking about the content of Christian faith. But I would take it that what he's saying here is not all believe. Either way, it comes out the same. Not all are Christians and unbelievers are the ones who are hostile. No, everyone isn't going to respond the way you did, so the beloved apostle calls for the intercession of the church so that the Word may move rapidly and triumphantly and the messengers will not be hindered by hostile unbelievers. That's his prayer.

There's a second desire of his heart, besides that they be prayerful, and that is that they be trusting, they be trusting. Now remember, he's not with them. And he says, "This is what I want to happen in your life." There's a certain sense in which he feels at arm's length, "and I can't be there to insure it, but this is my desire for you." Verse 3: "But the Lord is faithful and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one."

What he's saying to them is, look, no matter what happens, no matter how hostile they are, no matter how severe the persecution and trials and trouble, no matter what might happen, you know this, your Lord is faithful. Keep trusting.

Any pastor who is away from his people would want from the depths of heart that his people remain faithful to the God who is faithful to them. In contrast to faithless men in verse 2 is a faithful Lord in verse 3. And no matter what may come in trials and no matter what may come in persecutions, the Lord's plan for you will come to pass, He is faithful. Why Paul sure gave testimony to that at the end of his life in 2 Timothy 4:16, "At my first defense no one supported me, all deserted me but the Lord stood with me and strengthened me." Everybody else was gone, but He was there, He's faithful. I wish we had time to go through the Old Testament and the New to see how many times the Bible tells us the Lord is faithful. The Lord is faithful.

One text should be enough. First Corinthians 10:13, "But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it." Your God is so faithful He will never allow you to be assaulted at a level which is beyond your ability to handle. You have nothing to fear, just be trusting. Just be trusting. Your God is absolutely and always faithful and you need to hold to that. Even if we doubt, He remains faithful. You need to trust.

He will strengthen you, he says, he will strengthen you, *stērizō*. There's that word from which we get steroids, make you strong, make you firm, establish you. That's talking about the inside, strengthening your inner man, giving you an inner security. He'll build you up on the inside and protect you from the evil one on the outside. He will fill you with internal strength and He will shield you from the evil one, most likely a reference to Satan. It could be translated, "From the evil," but it is better to see it as "The evil one, Satan."

In the inside He'll strengthen you. On the outside He'll shield you so that you're never hit with satanic arrows that are going to destroy you and you have the internal strength to maintain your faith. There is your great security, beloved. No matter what comes or goes, a faithful Lord will strengthen you on the inside and guard you from attacks by the enemy on the outside.

I suppose Jude had it all when he said this, "He is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you

stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy." He will strengthen you so you don't fall. He will protect you so Satan cannot destroy you.

Thirdly, a third desire the pastor has for his people, that they be obedient, that they be obedient. The pastor has spent his time teaching the Word of God, in a sense, commanding. Remember Paul said to Timothy, "Command and teach." Teaching has the note of authority because we give you the Word of God. And Paul has the desire for his people that they maintain a pattern of obedience. Verse 4, "We have confidence," and it's a very positive approach to this exhortation, "we have confidence in the Lord," not in your flesh, "but in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command."

Paul says, “I can't be there. While I'm gone I want you to pray for the success of the message and the safety of the messenger. I can't be there. I can't be there to hold your hand and take you through the trials and comfort you, but you need to know this, you can trust the faithful Lord who will strengthen you on the inside and protect you on the outside. And I can't be there to watch you and monitor you and hold you accountable, but I believe and am confident that you, as you have continued to obey, will do so in the future. This is a positive approach based upon what he had seen, the pattern of obedience already established. And his confidence, as I said, was not a vote of confidence on human nature but in the Lord. And I know you are doing and you will continue to do what we command.”

Were these personal commands by Paul? No, he was simply passing them on. They came from God. He's essentially saying to them what he noted about them back in chapter 4 of his first letter. He said, "You ought to walk and please God just as you actually do walk, that you may excel still more." You're already doing it. I want you to do it more. I want you to do it better. Here he says it again. You're already doing it. I want you to continue to do it in the future.

Do what? Obey my commands. Scripture is command. Did you know that? It is command. Scripture in Psalm 19 is called, "the commandments of the Lord." Jesus said in the Great Commission, "Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Do you know that even the gospel is a command to repent and believe? All injunctions are commands. And so he says I want to see your continued, sustained, ongoing obedience and I'm confident in the Lord that you will continue by His strength to obey as you have been obeying.

What is the duty then of the people to the pastor? The sheep to their shepherd? To be prayerful on his behalf, that his message may succeed and that he may be safe in the proclamation of it. Their duty to him is to continue in their faithful trust in a faithful Lord who will never allow them to be weak on the inside and who will never allow them to be assaulted beyond what they are capable on the outside but will always be there to strengthen and protect them; and the duty to be obedient, to continue in the presence or absence of the shepherd to follow obediently the commands which he gave them from God.

And one last, a fourth desire, and I suppose we could use the word "spiritual," or better yet, that you be "spiritually growing," two words. His desire that they be spiritually growing is expressed in verse 5. "And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ."

Paul's expectation, because of the Lord's faithfulness to His people, because they had an obedient

inner man delighting in God's command, was that they were going to be all right. But he wanted them to continue spiritual growth. And in a sense, that's really what he's saying in this verse. "May the Lord direct your hearts." The word "direct" here means to make straight, “heart,” your inner person.

The word "direct" is used in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 of removing all the obstacles and hindrances out of the way and opening up a path. May the Lord open up a path for you so that your inner man can move down that path. He doesn't want any static here, nothing stationary. You aren't there yet. I want the Lord to open the path to clear the trail and to move your inner man down that path. To what? Into the love of God.

Is that objective or subjective? Are we talking about into God's love for you, or your love for God? And the answer is probably both. I love that ambiguity in the epistles. The Greek language provided the original writers a certain ambiguity that resulted in the fullness of the truth. Down the path into God's love for you and your love for Him. Lightfoot says, "The apostles availed themselves either consciously or unconsciously of the vagueness or rather comprehensiveness of language to express a great spiritual truth and that both meanings are so combined and interwoven that it is very seldom possible where the expression occurs to separate the one from the other." For you technicians that's the objective and subjective genitive. And when you look at it, you can't tell the difference in the original language and we feel that that's because they're both there.

Go down the path deeper and deeper into God's love for you which is going to cause you to love Him more and more. And secondly, he says, I want the Lord to lay out the path and push your inner being down the path into, notice it, the steadfastness or the patience of Christ. That can be either one; his patience with us or our patience in His strength through endurance. I want you to go down the path learning more and more how patient, how enduring Christ is over your sins and your problems and your struggles and even how greater you can understand His own endurance in His own struggles, and then consequently have a greater endurance of your own.

I want you to know more about God's love so you can love Him more. I want you to know more about Christ's endurance so you can endure more. I want you to grow spiritually in your love and in your endurance. That's his point. You're not there. I want you to advance in love and advance in patience under persecution as Christ did.

So, with a growing love and a growing endurance of the difficulties of life, the pastor wants his congregation to obey, trusting in the faithfulness of the Lord and praying always for the shepherd. No pastor could ask more than that from his people, that they be prayerful, trusting, obedient and spiritually growing. That's my desire for you, that God may be glorified in His church.

Father, thank You for the time in Your Word this morning. How it speaks contemporarily to our hearts, how it is so relevant. We today still cherish the same things for our people. They still hold us to the same standard that You set forth in Scripture and we still call them to the same pattern as well. Father, I pray for this people that they would be faithful to pray for their pastors, that they would continue trusting You as their strength and protection, that they would continue in the future of the pattern of obedience that is established in the present and that internally and spiritually they would grow, moving down that path toward a greater love for God and a greater endurance, like that of Jesus Christ. Do Your work, Lord, in pastor and people, that Your church may bring You glory. Amen.

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