



## BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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# The Power of the cross is foolishness to the world

## 1 Thessalonians 3

~ Brent Russell ~

- We return again to the marvellous life and ministry of this fledgling church in Thessalonica a town in Greece or then Macedonia
- I preached 2 weeks back on how by believing in the second coming of Christ it keeps our **minds firmly focused on heaven**
- And how this belief **empowers our ministry**
- Rod preached last week on 1 Thess 2 and ended with these three things:
  - **Jesus is coming back**
  - **We don't know when**
  - **Be ready for it!**
- And so this week we continue to delve into the life of the Thessalonian church
- **This small but blessed church who ministers because of the power of the Gospel and presence of the Holy Spirit**

### Let us read 1 Thessalonians 3

- As I mentioned two weeks ago Paul has **only praise** for this young church
- It is obvious by his words that **something extraordinary has happened** in their midst
- Their **ministry is effective**
- They have **endured through sufferings and persecutions**
- The **Gospel has been received by them with great joy**
- Their **faith is known** all around them
- **They are a small, young, but effective church and they are pleasing to Paul and to God**

- As much as they are good in every way
- And as much as Paul has endless praise for them:
- He is simply **bubbling over with excitement** for how this young church has done so well
- **There are some worries in his mind**
  
- In this chapter he speaks of some of the **concerns** in his mind
- After the enthusiasm of the first chapter he now shares some of his unease and concerns with the church
  
- You know when someone makes it big we say **"they have arrived"**
- In this chapter listening to Paul's words, it seems that **this church has yet to "arrive"**
  
- Paul expresses some fear about their faith in **three places in chapter 3**
- **Vs. 5** "I was afraid that in some way the tempter may have tempted you ..."
- **Vs. 10** "...see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith..."
- **Vs. 13** "...so that you will be blameless and holy...when Jesus comes again"
  
- Rod and I made a promise to you that we wanted to make you work
- And we would be unapologetic about it
- So for the next five minutes I am going to make you work quite hard
- I want you to read the 1<sup>st</sup> three chapters and then answer the following question

***"What is it that is lacking in their faith that is leading to these concerns of Paul?"***

- **There is some underlying spiritual need that this church has that has led Paul to be concerned about them**
- Something **underlying all of their success**
- Something **underneath all of their goodness**
- Something **beneath all the praise** that Paul heaps on them
- **There is a need, a lack in their faith in some way**
  
- **In places there are underlying spiritual needs in the life of many of you that cause Rod and I concern**
- There may even be **much success** in your spiritual lives
- And there is **much goodness** in you
- **And yet for some of you we do have deep unease because there are places where your faith needs to be supplied with something it is lacking**
- **So what is it that is lacking in the faith life of this church?**
  
- Well perhaps a little history is in order
- This church is made up of a **mix of people**
- Some are **Jewish** folk that have converted to the Christian faith from Judaism
- And some it seems where **Gentiles** converted to this new religion
- **More than anything, this church is young in every way**
  
- In fact Paul has only spent **two or three short months** with this young church
- Let me put this in context imagine some of us going to say Mozambique, starting a new church and ministering there for three months and then leaving them to continue on their own
- This church is made up of young Christians in the most tender of places in their growth in faith
- **It is their immaturity that worries Paul more than anything else**
- He is concerned that they have **not yet had the time to build up the strength** in faith to persist in ministry
- He is worried more than anything that they **are to young in their faith to resist temptation** of the evil one

- **Immaturity is not a bad thing in and of itself**
- **At some point we are all immature and act as such and we must be treated as such**
  
- I recall as a teenager I used to **race bicycles**
- And when I raced U/17 we had a limited size of gearing on our bicycles
- This was so that we had to keep our pedalling rate high
- So that we would not overtax our young tendons
- And so that we would learn good technique
- We were immature young riders and so we acted as such and were treated as such
- **And so Paul is not criticizing the church for being immature**
- **But it is a reality and a concern for him**
- And see he is worried that they may be tempted away from Jesus
- And he is worried that their faith is still growing and lacks in certain areas
- **As your ministers Rod and I also worry for some of you**
  
- There are always those who are **young in the faith**
- **Recent converts** who have understood the message of the Gospel with great joy as mentioned in chapter 1 of Thessalonians
- People who are **really excited about Jesus** and about serving Him
- Who are **doing all the right things**
- **Making all the right noises**
- And are really having life changing encounters with Jesus
- These are people having deep spiritual experiences
- **but people who like this Thessalonian church are in a particularly exposed place simply because they are young in the faith**
  
- **Immature – and that is OK – but it is none the less a concern and we want to add to your faith whatever may be lacking**

- Not talking about the Thessalonian church for a moment
- **There are those in the faith who are also in as dangerous a place with regards to temptation**
- But for the wrong reasons
- Out of a place of **stunted growth** they are **immature and underdeveloped**
- They are open to temptation because they have never built up the spiritual defences necessary to resist temptation
- **It concerns all ministers at some point or another at the lack of maturity of some 'old' Christians**
- Those who remain trapped in some place of Christian infancy
- Let us return to the Thessalonian church though;
- It is interesting that Paul is **not concerned about their persecution**
- He is **not worried that they will be tested in their faith**
- He is **not nervous that people will discriminate against the church**
- **His primary worry is that they will be tempted away by the evil one**
- **And that they will be found unholy on the day of Judgement**
- **Paul understand clearly that the persecutions, the mockery, the trials are what will make them strong and mature**
- You see having the faith to resist temptation is something that **comes with maturity**
- Like my little leg muscles as a teenager needed maturity to handle pedalling a big gear up steep hills
- Time is what should allow us to develop the necessary abilities to resist temptation
- And part of this maturity is **listening to the advice of other Christians**
- And **taking note of the words of Scripture** which help understand how to resist this temptation and to move on to full maturity
- **I am not suggesting that because someone is a mature Christian they are not tempted**
- But mature Christians have **developed the skills and lifestyles** that help them resist this temptation
- So that when Jesus comes again they may be presented as holy and blameless

- Paul is concerned not that they will have weak faith out of a long persecution
- He is not concerned that their hope will be diminished by constant trials and sufferings
- **No - his concern is that when they face Jesus that they will not be holy and blameless because they have given into temptation**
- **He is concerned that they will have allowed themselves to be dragged away and enticed by evil as James tells us**
- We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us... tell the scriptures in Romans 5
- **My concern for you as BPC is not that you will suffer, face trials, persecutions or illness because they will make you a better Christians**
- **These things whilst unpleasant and uncomfortable will help you mature**
- But my deep concern for you as is Paul's concern for the Thessalonian church is that you may be tempted and will not be holy and blameless when Jesus comes again
- We all should know that there is **nothing that can separate us from the love of God**
- **Ro 8:35-37** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
- None of these things will separate us from the love of God
- **But James chapter one is clear; that sin will lead to death**
- **Sin is what will separate you from God**
- The greatest danger we face is that we might be tempted back into sinful lifestyles
- **Lifestyles that will ultimately lead to death**
- **You see immaturity blinds our eyes to the bigger consequences of our actions**
- At **sixteen** you think your parents know nothing and you have all the answers
- At **24** you begin to realize that maybe they do know a little more than you give them credit for
- And you realize the mistakes you made in the past that they told you where mistakes!
- **Paul is simply concerned that this young church will be dragged away because of their immaturity**

- So let me get practical here
- My greatest fear is not that you will suffer for your faith, or that you will face some sort of difficulty – these things will produce in you character and thus hope
- But I am concerned that you will give in to temptation
- It is temptation back into sinful lifestyle that is the greatest danger for all Christians
- But mostly for those who are not mature for whatever reason
- So let me give to a number of ways that we may add to our faith
- Some practical advice and lifestyle changes
- That will help us towards maturity
- That will strengthen us against temptation
- So that we might be holy and blameless when we face Christ

### **1. Avoid sin like the plague**

- One of the first things that I was taught in public speaking was to not use clichés
- But I am going to: avoid sin like the plague
- **A sign of immaturity is that we think that we can sit with our heads in the mouth of the temptation and not get bitten**
- I recall seeing a video snip of a man showing of with a **crocodile**
- It is a disease that will kill your spirit
- We as Christians need to run away from sinful things
- **2 Tim 2** ...flee the evil desires of youth...
- **1 Cor 6** ...flee from sexual immorality
- **1 Cor 10** ...flee from idolatry...
- Run away!!!
- **When you flee temptation, be sure you don't leave a forwarding address!**

## 2. Do not make light of the seriousness of sin

- Sin is not something to be **laughed** at
- It has been said the easiest way to **make something unacceptable to be acceptable is to get people to laugh at it**
- Take a moment next time you watch the **telly**
- How much of what you watch with your family would be **unacceptable to God?**
- But notice how insignificant it seems when we laugh at it
  
- Over and over again the evil one is lowering our defences
- **Making us more susceptible to sin**
- **Making it seem silly, funny or comical and immediately your defences are lowered and we may give in to temptation**
  
- Friends this is serious
- I cannot make you understand how serious this is

## 3. Understand the power of sin to bind you

- Would you hang from a cliff from a single strand of fishing line?
- Yet every weekend I will hang from a 10mm rope made of many nylon strands each less than a tenth of a millimetre thick
- You see one or two strands break easily start adding more and before long you have a sturdy rope that will bind you down and trap you
- **1&2 Tim ...trap of the evil one...**
- The evil one is a sneaky liar the Bible tells us
- **John chapter 8 says that the home language of the evil one is lying in fact that he is the father of lies**
- **The lie he tells us is that small sins are not serious**
  
- Do not let small sins run rampant in your life – each on it's own is easy to overcome
- But they will add up and you might find your rope strong enough to hang yourself from
  
- **A sure sign of immaturity is the belief that we may still be OK by giving in to small sins and that we will get away unharmed**
- It is a lie
- Understand this please – even small sin has the power to drag you away little by little
- **How do you eat an Elephant? One bite at a time**

#### 4. Be accountable to someone

- **Sin operates in the dark**
- That is the nature of evil to operate out of the light
- And so the surest way to overcome temptation is to bring it into the light
- **Simply by letting someone else understand your temptation already robs it of the power it had**
- Bring it into the light and you will overcome it
- It sounds simple and it is simple
- **It is awkward and it does mean you need to be very vulnerable**
- **By allowing someone else to hold you accountable to living a good lifestyle it becomes that much easier to resist temptation**
  
- It is a sign of immaturity to keep things hidden
- **I am sure you recall as a child as I do having done something wrong**
- It somehow seemed better to keep it a secret
- Ultimately Dad found out and you realized the error of your ways with a rather painful bottom
  
- **By exposing the temptations which you face they become far less scary**
- **And they become less powerful**
- **Far easier to overcome because you will not be doing it on your own**
- **But others will walk alongside you**

## 5. Understand that you will have to give and account of yourself to God

- If you cannot put into place these other means of resisting temptation perhaps this last one will help you somewhat
- **There are several good protections against temptation, but the surest is cowardice. – Mark Twain**
- There is nothing more effective than **fear**
- **We need to have a holy fear of an awesome God**
- **Ro 3:10-18:** As the Scriptures say, “No one is good— not even one. No one has real understanding; no one is seeking God. All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one.” “Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their speech is filled with lies.” “The poison of a deadly snake drips from their lips.” “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” “They are quick to commit murder. Wherever they go, destruction and misery follow them. They do not know what true peace is.” “They have no fear of God to restrain them.”
  
- At some point Jesus will come to **judge the living and the dead**
- An absolute reality that at sometime we will come before God for judgement
- It may be when we die
- Or Jesus may come again before then, We don't know
  
- **This is Paul's fear – that the Thessalonians would face judgement and be found lacking by God**
- It is my deepest fear for some of you
- **That you will face God and will have your lifestyles judged by Him**
- **In Romans 8 we are told we will have to give an account of our lives to God**
- We will face judgement too and we will give account of our lifestyles to God
- **My fear is that you would have allowed sin to drag you to a place where you no longer want God's grace**
- **Perhaps the surest method for avoiding sin is the Fear of the Lord**
  
- **The motto for the average happy pagan is live like there is no tomorrow**
- Take what you can and run because tomorrow you may die and there is nothing beyond death
  
- **Well a sure means to resist temptation is to constantly remind yourself that you had better live like Jesus is coming tomorrow**
- **I recall friends having parties at home whilst parents were away and then having to clean up like mad because the parents would be back tomorrow**

- **Suddenly the stress levels go up somewhat!**
- **And the danger is that you would have been dragged away by temptation almost unknowingly**
- **And will have chosen to put yourself outside of the grace of God**

## ***Conclusion***

- Let me close loved ones
- **Like Paul, Rod and I care deeply for you as a congregation**
- We preach to you God's word week after week because like Paul and the Thessalonian church we love you and we want to care for you
- These letters from Paul are pastoral love letters
- He is preaching to them out of a place of deep concern
- Real love
- Profound affection for these fellow Christians
- For fellow sinners
  
- **Paul does this because he understands what is at stake here**
- I am not sure if we always fully appreciate what this is all about
- **But this is serious**
- **God is Holy and Just**
- **This means he is totally other and will judge with absolute impartiality**
- **And we will have to give an account of our lives to him at some point**

- **I am trying quite carefully to not use this as a stick to beat you to a place of obedience**
- I am trying to share with you the danger we walk through each day
- **As we carefully walk the path that leads to God we are surrounded on each side by turnoffs that seem enticing**
- **But if we take them it is easy to become blinded to that simple, truthful narrow road that will lead us to Christ**
  
- We may see these **turnoffs as detours** and we will get back on the narrow road
- And that may be true at points
- **But there are so many who already are on some side road that is leading them away from Jesus faster than they realise**
- Paul's fear and my fear is that you may get so far down that road that when you face judgement you may not have Christ to answer for you
- **That the tempter may have tempted you away and our efforts may have been useless**
- **Friends live your lives as if Jesus is coming tomorrow**
- **And you will be able to face him on that day Holy and blameless**
- **That is Jesus desire for His church**
- **It is Paul's desire for the Thessalonians**
- **It is my desire for you**