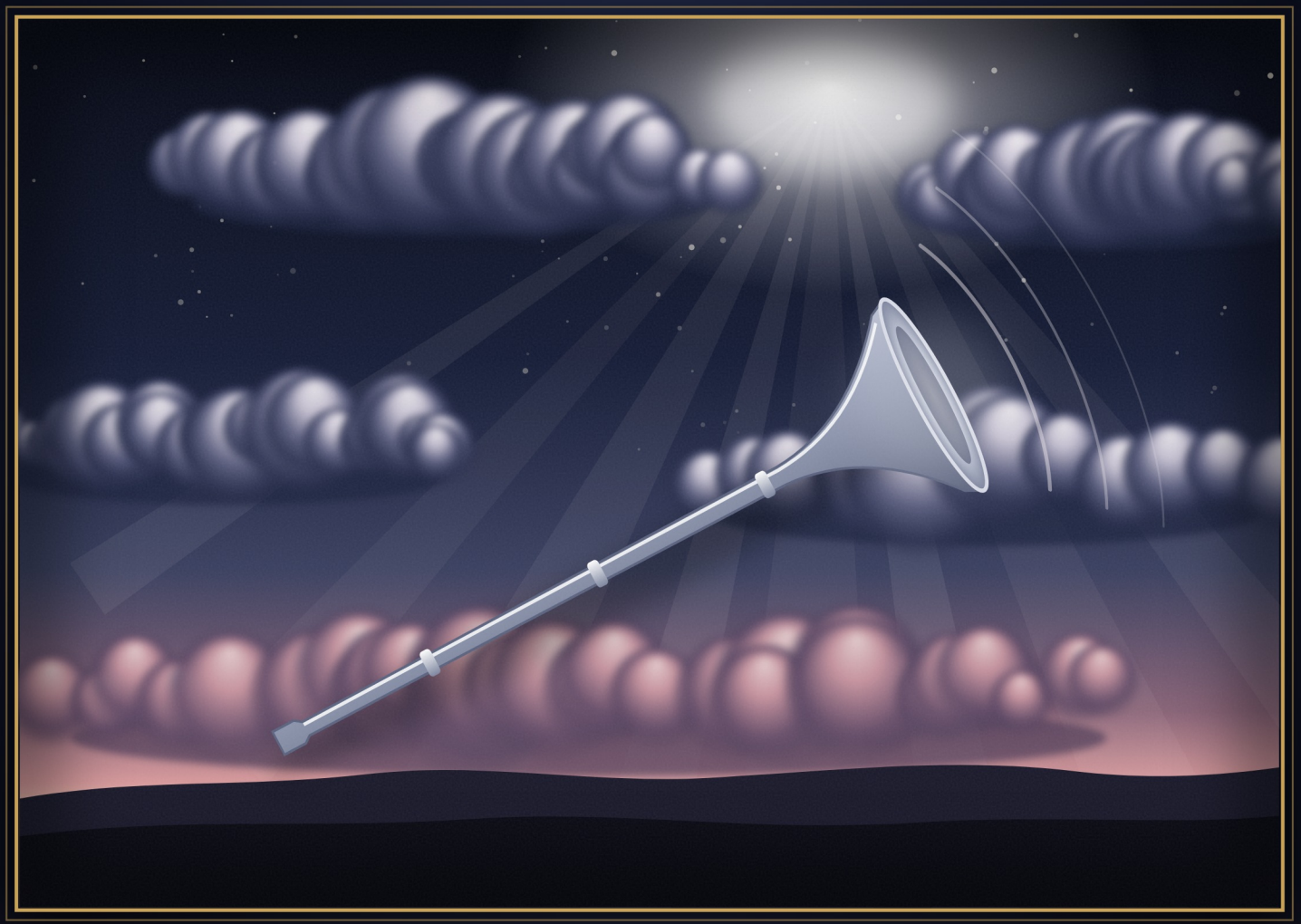
1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



Await His Son from the heavens, encourage one another, and stand firm

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1 and 2 Thessalonians Bible Study

A Verse-by-Verse Study

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1 and 2 Thessalonians Bible Study: A Verse-by-Verse Study

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

The Rapture and the Lord's return became real to me when I was young. That hope has stayed with me ever since. These letters are about waiting well. I still want to be found ready.

1 and 2 Thessalonians are two short letters Paul wrote to a young church that had been believers for only a few months. They were under attack for their faith, and they had questions about believers who had died and about the day of the Lord. In eight chapters Paul encourages them, teaches them how to live in a way that pleases God, and tells them more about the return of our Lord Jesus than almost any other letter in the New Testament. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on these letters. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand what He has given us in His Son. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. These are real letters to real people in a hard spot. Paul had to leave Thessalonica in a hurry after only a short stay (Acts 17:1-10), and he wrote the first letter from Corinth after Timothy came back with news of the church (1 Thessalonians 3:6). The second letter followed a few months later, after someone had upset the church with the idea that the day of the Lord had already come (2 Thessalonians 2:2). When we read what Paul says about the Lord's coming, we need to keep that setting in mind. Paul was not writing to win an argument or to draw a chart. He was writing to comfort grieving people, to

steady shaken people, and to call idle people back to work. If we keep the letters in their setting and compare them with the rest of Scripture, the plain meaning comes through clearly.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. These letters teach plainly about the future, and this study takes Paul at his word: Jesus really is coming back, the dead in Christ really will rise first, living believers really will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and God really has not appointed His people for wrath. I believe, as I explain in this study, that Christ will come for His church before the seven-year Tribulation and will return visibly to the earth at its end. Where other good Bible teachers see these things differently, I tell you so.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Greek, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.
- Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: eight weeks, five for 1 Thessalonians and three for 2 Thessalonians. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Overview and Background of each letter together.
- A slower pace: ten weeks. The Scripture for 1 Thessalonians 2 and 5 is printed in two parts, and the start of the second part is a natural place to stop. Most groups will also want extra time on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 and 2 Thessalonians 2, which teach about the Lord's coming and the day of the Lord.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be

answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of these letters touch painful subjects: grief over believers who have died (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), sexual purity (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8), suffering for the faith (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10), God's judgment on those who reject the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; 2:10-12), and church discipline for a believer who will not work (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Some in your group may be grieving a loved one, or may wonder about family members who do not know the Lord. The teaching on the end times is also a place where good Bible teachers disagree, and the study gives the main views fairly. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through 1 and 2 Thessalonians. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of 1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians is the thirteenth book of the New Testament. It sits between Colossians and 2 Thessalonians. It is one of Paul's letters to churches, and it is the first of two letters in our Bibles that he wrote to the believers in the city of Thessalonica. It is one of the earliest letters Paul wrote, and many Bible teachers believe it is the earliest of all. That means it gives us a picture of what Paul taught a brand new church in its first months.

The church in Thessalonica was young, but it was strong. These believers had turned from idols to the living God, and they kept their faith even while their neighbors made life hard for them. Paul had been pulled away from them too soon, and he was worried about how they were doing. When Timothy brought back a good report, Paul wrote this warm letter to thank God for them, to remind them how he had lived among them, and to answer what they still needed to know. Paul sums up their story near the start of the letter. Other believers were telling how the Thessalonians "turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God" (1:9). Then Paul adds the hope that runs through the whole letter:

1 Thessalonians 1:10 (SLB)

"and to await His Son from the heavens, whom He raised out of ***the*** dead, Jesus, who is delivering us from the wrath that is coming."

Those verses hold the whole letter. They turned to God. They served Him. And they waited for His Son from heaven. Every chapter of 1 Thessalonians ends by looking ahead to the coming of the Lord Jesus (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23). In chapter 4 Paul gives the clearest teaching in the Bible on what many call the rapture, when the dead in Christ will rise first and living believers will be caught up with them "to meet the Lord in the air" (4:17). In chapter 5 he tells them that the day of the Lord will come like a thief on an unbelieving world, but "God did not appoint us for wrath" (5:9). The hope of His coming is not something to argue about and then set aside. It is meant to comfort us, to make us holy, and to keep us working and loving while we wait.

1 Thessalonians has 5 chapters and 89 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Looking Back on How the Church Began (chapters 1 to 3)

- Chapter 1: A Model Church
- Chapter 2: Paul's Ministry Among Them
- Chapter 3: Timothy's Good Report

Part Two: How to Live Until the Lord Comes (chapters 4 and 5)

- Chapter 4: Holy Living and the Coming of the Lord
- Chapter 5: The Day of the Lord and Final Instructions

Background of 1 Thessalonians

Author: The letter opens with "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy" (1:1). Silvanus is the same man Luke calls Silas in Acts, who traveled with Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40). Timothy was Paul's young helper, who joined them in Lystra (Acts 16:1-3). Paul is the main voice of the letter, and more than once he steps out and speaks for himself alone (2:18; 3:5; 5:27). The early church accepted Paul as the author, and almost all scholars today, even those who doubt that Paul wrote some of the other letters, agree that he wrote this one. I take the letter at its word, as the church always has.

Who it was written to: Paul writes "to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). Some of the first believers were Jews from the synagogue, but most were Gentiles, people who were not Jewish by birth. Luke tells us that "of the worshiping Greeks a great multitude" believed (Acts 17:4), and Paul says that they "turned to God from the idols" (1:9). That tells us many of them had worshiped the gods of Greece and Rome before they came to Christ.

The city of Thessalonica: Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia, in what is now northern Greece. It sat on a good harbor at the top of the Aegean Sea, and the great Roman road called the Via Egnatia ran right through it, linking Rome with the East. That made it a busy city of trade, full of travelers, sailors, and merchants. Rome had made it a free city, which meant it ran its own local affairs under its own city leaders. Luke calls them the "city authorities" (Acts 17:6). The city is still there today. It is called Thessaloniki, and it is the second largest city in Greece. A city on a main road was a good place to plant a church. News from Thessalonica traveled fast, and so did the gospel (1:8).

How the church began: Paul, Silas, and Timothy came to Thessalonica on Paul's second missionary journey, after they had been beaten and jailed in Philippi (Acts 16:22-24; 1 Thessalonians 2:2). Paul went to the synagogue, and "for three Sabbaths he was reasoning with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2), showing that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead and that Jesus is the Christ. Some Jews believed, along with a great number of Greeks and a good number of leading women. But some of the Jews who did not believe stirred up a mob and attacked the house of Jason, where Paul was staying. When they could not find Paul, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city leaders and charged them with saying "another is king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7). The believers sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea (Acts 17:10). Paul's stay may have been longer than three weeks. He worked night and day at his trade while he was there (2:9), and the church in Philippi sent him help more than once (Philippians 4:16). But it was still a short time, and he left behind a church of brand new believers facing hard opposition.

When and where it was written: From Berea, Paul went on to Athens. He was so worried about the Thessalonians that he sent Timothy back to them (3:1-2). Paul then went on to Corinth, and Silas and Timothy came to him there from Macedonia (Acts 18:5). Timothy brought good news of their faith and love (3:6), and Paul wrote this letter soon after. Paul stayed in Corinth a year and six months (Acts 18:11), and part of that time overlapped with the rule of Gallio as governor of Achaia (Acts 18:12). An old stone inscription found at Delphi helps date Gallio's time in office to

about A.D. 51 to 52. That is why most scholars date 1 Thessalonians to about A.D. 51, written from Corinth.

Purpose: Paul wrote for several reasons. He wanted to thank God for their faith, love, and hope (1:2-3). He wanted to answer false charges against him and remind them how he had lived among them (2:1-12). He wanted to encourage them to stand firm under persecution (3:1-5). He wanted to call them to holy living, brotherly love, and honest work (4:1-12). And he wanted to answer their questions about believers who had died before the Lord came, and about the day of the Lord (4:13-5:11). Through it all, Paul writes like a father to his children (2:11), and the hope of the Lord's return runs through every chapter.

1 Thessalonians 1: A Model Church

Scripture

1:1-10 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of ***the*** Thessalonians in God ***the*** Father and ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace from God our Father and ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always concerning you all, making mention of you in our prayers, unceasingly remembering your work of faith and labor of love and endurance of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father, knowing, brothers beloved by God, your election, because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in ***the*** Holy Spirit and in much full assurance, just as you know what sort ***of men*** we became among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with joy of ***the*** Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all who believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For 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 have no need to say anything. For they themselves report concerning us what sort of entrance we had to you, and how you turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God, and to await His Son from the heavens, whom He raised out of ***the*** dead, Jesus, who is delivering us from the wrath that is coming.

Preview

Paul opens his first letter to the Thessalonians with thanks. He had been with them only a short time before he was forced to leave, and he had worried about them ever since. Now he has heard that they are standing firm, and his heart is full. He thanks God for their work of faith, their labor of love, and their endurance of hope. He reminds them that the gospel came to them with power and with the Holy Spirit, and that they welcomed it even while they suffered for it.

Then Paul tells them what other people are saying. Their faith has become known all over Macedonia and Achaia and beyond. Everyone is talking about how they turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath that is coming. In ten verses we get a picture of what a healthy church looks like, and the chapter ends where every chapter of this letter ends: looking ahead to the coming of the Lord.

Study

1:1 *Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of* ***the*** *Thessalonians in God* ***the*** *Father and* ***the*** *Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace from God our Father and* ***the*** *Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul names three men in the greeting: himself, Silvanus, and Timothy. Silvanus is the full Roman form of the name Silas, the man who traveled with Paul and was beaten and jailed with him in Philippi (Acts 16:19-25). Timothy was the young believer Paul had taken along on this journey (Acts 16:1-3). All three had preached in Thessalonica, and all three knew these believers.

Notice that Paul does not call himself an apostle here, as he does in most of his letters. These believers loved and trusted him, and he did not need to defend his authority to them at the start.

He writes to "the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The word church means an assembly, a gathering of people called out. It is not a building. It is people. And this church lives in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is where their life comes from. Paul puts the Father and the Son side by side as the one place where the church lives, and as the one source of "grace to you and peace." Grace is God's favor that we did not earn. Peace is what comes from that grace: peace with God and peace in our hearts. A Jewish man like Paul would never put a mere man next to God that way. He knew Jesus is God.

1:2 *We give thanks to God always concerning you all, making mention of you in our prayers,*

Paul begins with thanks. "We give thanks to God always concerning you all." He does not thank the Thessalonians for being such good people. He thanks God, because what he sees in them is God's work.

Paul gives thanks always, and he gives thanks for "you all." He did not just thank God for the leaders or for the ones who were easy to love. He thanked God for every one of them, all the time. That is a good pattern for us. When was the last time you thanked God for the people in your church by name?

"Making mention of you in our prayers." Paul, Silas, and Timothy were in Corinth, starting a new work there, but they kept praying for the church they had left behind. Prayer was how they kept caring for people they could not visit. We can do the same for missionaries, for family far away, and for believers we may never meet.

1:3 *unceasingly remembering your work of faith and labor of love and endurance of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father,*

Here are the three great marks of this church: "your work of faith and labor of love and endurance of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul puts faith, love, and hope together often (1 Corinthians 13:13; Colossians 1:4-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:8). But here he shows what each one produces.

Faith produces work. Real faith in Christ does not sit still. It shows itself in what we do. We are not saved by our works, but faith that never works is not real faith (James 2:17-18; Ephesians 2:8-10).

Love produces labor. The word for labor means hard, tiring work, the kind that leaves you worn out. Love is willing to wear itself out for others.

Hope produces endurance. Endurance means staying under a heavy load without giving up. And notice where the hope is aimed: "of our Lord Jesus Christ." Their hope was not that life would get easier. Their hope was Jesus Himself and His coming. When you know He is coming, you can keep going under almost any weight.

All of this happened "before our God and Father." They lived their lives in front of God, and He saw every bit of it.

1:4 *knowing, brothers beloved by God, your election,*

"Knowing, brothers beloved by God, your election." Paul calls them brothers, a family word for fellow believers, men and women alike. And he says they are "beloved by God." These former idol worshipers were now loved by the living God.

Election means God's choosing. Paul says he knows that God chose them. How did he know? He tells us in the next verse. He saw the evidence in how the gospel came to them and in how they received it.

Bible teachers have long disagreed about how God's choosing works. Some believe God chose specific people for salvation based only on His own will and grace. Others believe God chose, in Christ, all who He knew would believe, based on His foreknowledge (Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:1-2). Both sides agree that salvation is God's work from start to finish, and that every person is called to repent and believe (Acts 17:30). What this verse plainly teaches is that God's love comes first, and that a changed life is the evidence that God has been at work.

1:5 *because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in* ***the*** *Holy Spirit and in much full assurance, just as you know what sort* ***of men*** *we became among you for your sake.*

"Because our gospel did not come to you in word only." Paul did preach words, and words matter. But the gospel came "also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much full assurance." The Holy Spirit was at work as Paul preached, opening hearts and changing lives. Power here may include miracles, as in other places Paul preached (Romans 15:18-19), but above all it means the power of God to save (Romans 1:16).

"Much full assurance" can mean Paul's own confidence as he preached, or the deep conviction the Thessalonians felt as they listened. Both were true. When the Spirit works, the preacher speaks with boldness and the hearer knows the message is true.

Then Paul adds, "just as you know what sort of men we became among you for your sake." The message and the messengers matched. Paul's life backed up his preaching. That is still true today. People listen to our words, but they also watch our lives.

1:6 *And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with joy of* ***the*** *Holy Spirit,*

"And you became imitators of us and of the Lord." The Thessalonians copied Paul, and by copying Paul they were copying Jesus. Paul was not asking them to follow him instead of Christ. He was asking them to follow him as he followed Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). New believers need living examples, people they can watch.

They received the word "in much tribulation with joy of the Holy Spirit." Tribulation here means pressure and trouble. It is the ordinary suffering believers face in this world (John 16:33), not the future seven-year Tribulation. From the very first day, believing in Jesus cost these people something. Acts 17:5-9 tells us about the riot and the charges against Jason.

But look at what came with the trouble: joy. That joy was not something they worked up on their own. It came from the Holy Spirit. A believer can have hard times and deep joy at the same time. The world cannot understand that, but it is true.

1:7 *so that you became examples to all who believe in Macedonia and Achaia.*

"So that you became examples to all who believe in Macedonia and Achaia." Macedonia was the northern part of Greece, where Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were. Achaia was the southern part, where Athens and Corinth were. Between them, these two provinces covered most of Greece.

The word for example was used for a mark left by a blow, or a pattern pressed into something, like a stamp. The Thessalonians had only been believers for a few months, and they were already a pattern for other churches. You do not have to be a believer for many years to be an example. You only have to be faithful where God has put you.

Paul says "examples" to "all who believe." Older churches looked at this young church and saw what real faith looks like under pressure.

1:8 *For 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 have no need to say anything.*

"For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth." The word Paul uses here was used for a trumpet blast or for thunder that rolls out across the land. The message about Jesus rang out from Thessalonica in every direction.

How did that happen? Thessalonica sat on a major Roman road and had a busy harbor. Travelers, merchants, and sailors passed through all the time. The believers told others about Jesus, and the news of what God had done in that city spread. Paul says it had gone out "not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place."

"So that we have no need to say anything." When Paul arrived in a new town and started to tell what had happened in Thessalonica, people already knew. The church's changed lives had done the talking. That is the best kind of witness. Our words still matter (Romans 10:14), but a changed life opens doors for those words.

1:9 *For they themselves report concerning us what sort of entrance we had to you, and how you turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God,*

"For they themselves report concerning us what sort of entrance we had to you." Other people were telling Paul about his own visit to Thessalonica, and about what happened to the people there.

Here is what they were saying: "how you turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God." Notice the order. They turned to God, and in doing so they turned from idols. That is what repentance looks like. Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of direction. They did not just add Jesus to the gods they already worshiped. They walked away from the idols completely.

In Thessalonica that was costly. Idol worship was tied to family life, trade guilds, and city festivals. Turning from the idols could mean losing friends, business, and standing in the city.

They turned "to serve a living and true God." The idols were dead and false. The God of the Bible is living and true. Do we have idols? Most of us do not bow to statues, but anything we love, trust, or serve more than God is an idol (1 John 5:21).

1:10 *and to await His Son from the heavens, whom He raised out of* ***the*** *dead, Jesus, who is delivering us from the wrath that is coming.*

Now comes the third part of their story: "and to await His Son from the heavens." They turned, they served, and they waited. These new believers had learned in a few short weeks that Jesus is coming back. They lived every day looking up.

Paul tells us who they were waiting for. He is God's Son. He is coming "from the heavens," where He went when He rose and ascended (Acts 1:9-11). God raised Him "out of the dead," which proves that everything He said is true. And He is "Jesus, who is delivering us from the wrath that is coming."

What is "the wrath that is coming"? Wrath is God's settled anger against sin, His just judgment on a world that has rejected Him. Scripture speaks of that wrath in two ways. There is the final judgment, when all who reject Christ are separated from God forever (Revelation 20:11-15). And there is the wrath poured out on the earth in the day of the Lord, which Revelation 6 to 19 describes during the Tribulation. When the sixth seal is opened, the people of the earth cry out that "the great day of His wrath has come" (Revelation 6:17).

I believe Jesus delivers His church from both. He saves us from eternal judgment, and He will take His church out of the world before the wrath of the Tribulation falls. Paul will explain this more in 4:13-5:11, where he says plainly, "God did not appoint us for wrath" (5:9). The word Paul uses for deliver means to rescue, to snatch someone out of danger. Jesus is not a Savior who leaves us to face the wrath and then helps us survive it. He is the One who rescues us from it.

Other Bible teachers read the wrath here as only the final judgment of the lost, and some believe the church will pass through the Tribulation and be kept safe within it. But the plain hope Paul gave these young believers was to wait for Jesus from heaven, not for the Tribulation. That is still our hope. We are not waiting for the Antichrist, the false ruler of the last days that Paul describes in 2 Thessalonians 2. We are waiting for Christ.

Summary

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy greet the church of the Thessalonians and thank God for every one of them. They remember the church's work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, and they know God chose these believers because the gospel came to them in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance. The Thessalonians copied Paul and the Lord, receiving the word with joy in the middle of trouble, and they became an example to believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The news of their faith spread everywhere: they turned to God from idols,

to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, Jesus, whom God raised from the dead and who delivers us from the wrath that is coming.

Previous pastors have been examples of faith to me. They lived it, not just preached it. Paul says the Thessalonians became an example to others. I want to be that for someone else.

Study Questions

1. Who sent this letter, and what do we know about these men from Acts 16 and 17? (1:1)

2. What three things did Paul remember about the Thessalonians, and what did each one produce? (1:3)

3. How did Paul know that God had chosen these believers? (1:4-5)

4. What came with the tribulation the Thessalonians faced when they received the word? (1:6)

5. How did the word of the Lord spread from Thessalonica? (1:7-8)

6. What three things did other people report about the Thessalonians? (1:9-10)

7. What does it mean that Jesus is "delivering us from the wrath that is coming"? (1:10)

8. Who has been an example of faith to you, and how could you be that kind of example to someone else? (1:6-7)

9. What idols, things you love or trust more than God, might you need to turn away from? (1:9)

10. How would your week look different if you lived each day waiting for Jesus to come from heaven? (1:10)

1 Thessalonians 2: Paul's Ministry Among Them

Scripture

2:1-12 For you yourselves know, brothers, our entrance to you, that it has not been in vain; but even after having previously suffered and having been mistreated, just as you know, in Philippi, we had boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much conflict. For our exhortation ***is*** not from error, nor from impurity, nor in deceit; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who examines our hearts. For neither did we at any time come with a word of flattery, just as you know, nor with a pretext for greed; God ***is*** witness; nor seeking glory from men, neither from you nor from others, ***though*** being able to be weighty as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children. So, longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you have become beloved to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil; for working night and day so as not to burden any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You ***are*** witnesses, and God, how devoutly and righteously and blamelessly we were toward you who believe; just as you know how each one of you, as a father his own children, ***we were*** exhorting you and encouraging and testifying, that you should walk worthily of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

2:13-20 Because of this we also give thanks to God unceasingly, that having received ***the*** word of hearing from us, ***the word*** of God, you accepted ***it*** not ***as the*** word of men, but just as it truly is, ***the*** word of God, which also works in you who believe. For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God that are in Judea in Christ Jesus, because you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they also ***did*** from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and drove us out, and ***are*** not pleasing God, and ***are*** opposed to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as to fill up their sins always; but the wrath has come upon them to ***the*** end. But we, brothers, having been orphaned from you for ***the*** time of an hour, in face, not in heart, were more abundantly eager to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you, I Paul indeed, both once and twice, and Satan hindered us. For what ***is*** our hope or joy or crown of boasting? Or ***is it*** not even you, before our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.

Preview

After Paul left Thessalonica, his enemies seem to have spread stories about him. They may have said he was just another traveling teacher out for money and praise, a man who ran off at the first sign of trouble and did not care about the people he left behind. In this chapter Paul answers those charges. He does not do it by bragging. He does it by reminding the Thessalonians of what they saw with their own eyes. He came with boldness after being mistreated in Philippi. He did not flatter them or use them. He was gentle with them like a nursing mother, and he worked night and day so he would not be a burden. He urged them like a father to walk worthy of God.

In the second half, Paul thanks God that they received his message as what it truly is, the word of God. They suffered for it, just as the churches in Judea had suffered. Then Paul opens his heart. He

had been torn away from them and had tried again and again to come back, but Satan hindered him. He longs to see them, because they are his hope, his joy, and his crown when the Lord Jesus comes.

Study

2:1 *For you yourselves know, brothers, our entrance to you, that it has not been in vain;*

"For you yourselves know, brothers." Paul uses this kind of phrase again and again in this chapter (2:1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 11). He is not asking them to take his word for it. He is asking them to remember what they saw.

"Our entrance to you, that it has not been in vain." In vain means empty, without result. Paul's visit was short, and it ended with a riot, but it was not empty. A church was born. People were changed. Sometimes we judge a work for God by how long it lasted or how smoothly it went. God judges it by what He did through it.

2:2 *but even after having previously suffered and having been mistreated, just as you know, in Philippi, we had boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much conflict.*

"But even after having previously suffered and having been mistreated, just as you know, in Philippi." Acts 16:19-24 tells what happened. In Philippi, Paul and Silas were dragged into the marketplace, stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown into the inner prison with their feet in stocks. Paul was a Roman citizen, and that kind of treatment was against Roman law (Acts 16:37). He felt the shame of it.

Most of us would have slowed down after that, or at least changed our message. Paul did not. "We had boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much conflict." His boldness did not come from his own courage. It came "in our God." And the message was not his own idea. It was "the gospel of God." When we feel afraid to speak about Jesus, we can ask God for the same boldness (Acts 4:29-31).

2:3 *For our exhortation **is** not from error, nor from impurity, nor in deceit;*

Now Paul answers the charges against him. "For our exhortation is not from error, nor from impurity, nor in deceit." An exhortation is an urgent call, a message that pleads with people to act.

Paul's message did not come from error. He was not mistaken or misled. It did not come from impurity. He had no hidden, selfish motives. Some traveling teachers of that day used religion as a cover for greed or sexual sin. It did not come "in deceit." The word was used for bait on a fishing hook. Paul did not trick people into the kingdom. He told them the truth plainly.

2:4 *but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who examines our hearts.*

"But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak." The word approved means tested and found genuine, like metal tested in a fire. God had tested Paul

and trusted him with the gospel. That is a serious thing. The gospel is not ours to change. We are stewards, people trusted to care for something that belongs to someone else (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).

"Not as pleasing men, but God, who examines our hearts." Every preacher and teacher faces this pull. It is easy to say what people want to hear. But the One we answer to is God, and He sees more than our words. He tests our hearts. Who are you trying to please? If it is God, you will be free from the fear of what people think (Galatians 1:10).

2:5 *For neither did we at any time come with a word of flattery, just as you know, nor with a pretext for greed; God **is** witness;*

"For neither did we at any time come with a word of flattery, just as you know." Flattery is praise that is not honest, praise used to get something from someone. Paul did not butter them up. They knew it.

"Nor with a pretext for greed; God is witness." A pretext is a mask, a cover story. Paul's ministry was not a cover for getting money. On flattery he could say "you know," because they heard his words. On greed he says "God is witness," because only God could see his heart. Paul was ready to stand before God on this.

Sadly, there are still people who use the name of Jesus to get rich. The way to tell the difference is the same as it was in Paul's day: look at the message, and look at the life.

2:6 *nor seeking glory from men, neither from you nor from others, **though** being able to be weighty as apostles of Christ.*

"Nor seeking glory from men, neither from you nor from others." Glory here means praise and honor. Paul did not preach to build his own name.

"Though being able to be weighty as apostles of Christ." To be weighty means to throw your weight around, to make demands. It can also mean to be a financial burden. As apostles, men sent with the authority of Christ, Paul and his team had the right to ask for support and respect (1 Corinthians 9:4-14). They chose not to press that right. Real authority in the church does not need to show off.

2:7 *But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.*

"But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children." This is one of the most tender pictures in Paul's letters. A nursing mother does not care for her baby to get something from it. She gives. She warms the child, feeds it, and protects it. The word cherish means to warm, like a bird keeping its young warm under its wings.

That is how Paul treated these new believers. We sometimes picture Paul as stern and tough, and he could be firm when he needed to be. But here he says he was gentle. Many Greek copies read gentle here, and some read infants, as if Paul were saying he became like a little child among them. The SLB reads gentle, and either way the point is the same. Paul did not come in as a master. He came as one who served.

2:8 *So, longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you have become beloved to us.*

"So, longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls." Paul did not just deliver a message and leave. He gave them himself. His time, his energy, his heart.

That is what real ministry looks like. It is not enough to hand people the truth from a distance. We share our lives with them. Why? "Because you have become beloved to us." Paul had come to love these people. The gospel is a message, but it travels best through people who love one another.

Think about the person who led you to Christ, or who helped you grow. Most likely they did more than tell you facts. They gave you their time and their heart.

2:9 *For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil; for working night and day so as not to burden any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.*

"For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil." Paul was a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18:3). In Thessalonica he worked "night and day so as not to burden any of you." That probably means he started work before the sun came up and kept at it into the evening, and preached and taught in between.

Why did he do this? So that no one could say he was in it for the money, and so that he would not be a burden on a young church that was poor and under pressure. Paul had the right to be supported (1 Corinthians 9:14), but he set that right aside for their sake. He will come back to this example in 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, when some in the church stopped working.

Work is not beneath the gospel. Paul proclaimed the gospel of God with tools in his hands.

2:10 *You **are** witnesses, and God, how devoutly and righteously and blamelessly we were toward you who believe;*

"You are witnesses, and God, how devoutly and righteously and blamelessly we were toward you who believe." Paul calls two witnesses: the Thessalonians, who saw his life, and God, who saw his heart.

Devoutly means in a way that is holy toward God. Righteously means in a way that is right toward people. Blamelessly means no one could bring a fair charge against him. That does not mean Paul was sinless. It means his life gave no one a good reason to reject his message. That is what God asks of every believer, and especially of church leaders (1 Timothy 3:2, 7).

2:11-12 *just as you know how each one of you, as a father his own children, **we were** exhorting you and encouraging and testifying, that you should walk worthily of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

Now Paul uses a second family picture. He was gentle like a mother (2:7). He also led them like a father. "As a father his own children, we were exhorting you and encouraging and testifying." A

good father in that day was responsible to teach and train his children. Paul did three things. He exhorted them, which means he urged them on. He encouraged them, which means he comforted and cheered them. He testified, which means he solemnly told them what is true and what is required.

And Paul did this with "each one of you." He did not just preach to a crowd. He spent time with people one by one.

What was the goal? "That you should walk worthily of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." To walk means to live day by day. To walk worthily of God means to live in a way that fits who God is and what He has done for us. We do not earn His call by walking worthy. He has already called us, and we live like it. And notice where He calls us: into "His own kingdom and glory." The kingdom of God is a present reality in the lives of believers, and it is also a future kingdom that Christ will set up on the earth when He returns (Revelation 20:4-6). The glory is still ahead of us.

2:13 *Because of this we also give thanks to God unceasingly, that having received **the** word of hearing from us, **the word** of God, you accepted **it** not **as the** word of men, but just as it truly is, **the** word of God, which also works in you who believe.*

"Because of this we also give thanks to God unceasingly." Paul turns back to thanks. Why? Because when the Thessalonians heard the message, "you accepted it not as the word of men, but just as it truly is, the word of God."

This is one of the clearest statements in Scripture about what the apostles' message really was. Paul's preaching came through a man, but it was not man's word. It was God's word. The same is true of the Scriptures Paul and the other apostles wrote down (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:15-16).

And look at what the word of God does: it "also works in you who believe." God's Word is not dead ink on a page. It is at work in believers, changing how we think and live (Hebrews 4:12). How do you receive the Bible when you read it or hear it taught? As good advice, or as the word of God?

2:14 *For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God that are in Judea in Christ Jesus, because you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they also **did** from the Jews,*

"For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God that are in Judea in Christ Jesus." Judea was the land around Jerusalem, where the first churches were. Those Jewish believers had suffered at the hands of their own people from the beginning (Acts 8:1-3). Paul knew this better than anyone, because before he met Christ he had been one of the persecutors (Galatians 1:13).

"Because you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen." The Thessalonians were mostly Gentiles, and their persecution came from their own Gentile neighbors as well as from the synagogue. Acts 17:5 tells us some Jews started the trouble, and the city crowd joined in. Suffering for Christ joined the Thessalonians to a long line of believers. They were not alone, and neither are we.

2:15-16 *who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and drove us out, and **are** not pleasing God, and **are** opposed to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as to fill up their sins always; but the wrath has come upon them to **the** end.*

These are some of the strongest words Paul ever wrote about his own people. He speaks of "the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and drove us out." Paul knew that last part firsthand: he and Silas had to be sent away from Thessalonica by night (Acts 17:10). He means the Jewish leaders and those who followed them in rejecting Jesus and fighting the gospel. They were "forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved."

We need to read these verses carefully. Paul was a Jew himself (Philippians 3:5). Jesus and all the apostles were Jews. The first church was entirely Jewish, and thousands of Jews believed (Acts 2:41; 21:20). Paul is not speaking about every Jewish person, and he is not speaking about Jewish people today. He is speaking about those in his own day who were fighting the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. In Romans 9:1-5 and 10:1 he tells us his heart's desire was for his people to be saved. These verses have been twisted to excuse hatred of Jewish people, and that is a terrible sin. No one who loves Jesus, a Jewish Savior, can hate the people He came from.

"So as to fill up their sins always; but the wrath has come upon them to the end." Filling up sins is a picture from the Old Testament of sin reaching its full measure before judgment falls (Genesis 15:16). Bible teachers read "the wrath has come upon them to the end" in more than one way. Some see a judgment that had already begun, such as the hardening Paul describes in Romans 11:7-10. Others see Paul looking ahead to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as so certain that he speaks of it as already done. "To the end" can mean fully, or at last.

What we know for sure is that this is not God's final word about Israel. Paul tells us that "a hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25), and "so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). God still has a future for the nation of Israel. His promises to them stand.

2:17 *But we, brothers, having been orphaned from you for **the** time of an hour, in face, not in heart, were more abundantly eager to see your face with great desire.*

"But we, brothers, having been orphaned from you for the time of an hour." Paul uses a striking word here. Orphaned. Usually it is the children who are orphaned when they lose their parents. Paul says he felt like a parent who had lost his children, or like a child who had lost his family. Either way, being torn away from them hurt.

"In face, not in heart." He was away from them in person, but never in his heart. "Were more abundantly eager to see your face with great desire." Paul's enemies may have said he did not care about the church he left behind. The opposite was true. He could hardly stand being away. Leaving was not his choice. The believers sent him off at night to protect him (Acts 17:10).

2:18 *Therefore we wanted to come to you, I Paul indeed, both once and twice, and Satan hindered us.*

"Therefore we wanted to come to you, I Paul indeed, both once and twice." Paul tried more than once to go back. "And Satan hindered us." The word hindered was used for breaking up a road so an army could not pass, putting obstacles in the way.

Scripture does not tell us exactly what Satan used. It may have been the pledge Jason gave the city leaders (Acts 17:9), or ongoing danger in the city, or something else. What we know is that Satan is real, and he works against the spread of the gospel. Paul does not blame God for the delay, and he does not shrug it off as bad luck. He names the enemy.

Not every closed door comes from Satan. Sometimes God Himself closes a door, as He did to Paul in Acts 16:6-7. We need wisdom to tell the difference. But either way, God is greater. Satan could keep Paul out of Thessalonica, but he could not stop the letter, and he could not stop the church.

2:19 *For what **is** our hope or joy or crown of boasting? Or **is it** not even you, before our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?*

"For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting? Or is it not even you, before our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" Paul looks ahead to the day he will stand before the Lord Jesus. What does he hope to bring with him that day? Not money, not fame, not buildings. People.

The word for coming here is parousia. It means presence or arrival, and in Paul's day it was used for the visit of a king or an emperor to a city. Paul uses it often in these letters for the coming of the Lord (3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8).

The crown is the victor's wreath given to the winner of a race. Scripture speaks of the judgment seat of Christ, where each believer will be "made manifest" and "receive back the things done through the body" (2 Corinthians 5:10). That judgment is not about whether we are saved. That was settled at the cross. It is about rewards for faithful service (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Pre-tribulation teachers place it after Christ comes for His church and before He returns to the earth with His saints. Paul is saying that the people he brought to Christ and helped to grow will be his joy and his reward on that day.

Who will be your joy before the Lord Jesus at His coming?

2:20 *For you are our glory and joy.*

"For you are our glory and joy." Paul does not wait for that day to be glad about them. They are his glory and joy now.

A man who was only in it for himself would never write like this. Paul's enemies said he did not care. His answer was to open his heart and show them how much they meant to him. Real spiritual leaders find their joy in the growth of the people they serve (3 John 4).

Summary

Paul reminds the Thessalonians of how he lived among them. After being mistreated in Philippi, he came with boldness to preach the gospel of God, not from error or impure motives or trickery, but as a man tested and trusted by God, seeking to please God rather than men. He did not flatter them or use them for money or praise. He was gentle among them like a nursing mother, shared his own life with them, worked night and day so as not to be a burden, and urged each one like a father to walk worthily of God. Paul thanks God that they received his message as the word of God, which works in those who believe. They suffered from their own countrymen as the churches in Judea had. Torn away from them and hindered by Satan from returning, Paul longs to see them, for they are his hope, joy, and crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus at His coming.

Study Questions

1. What had happened to Paul and Silas in Philippi before they came to Thessalonica? (2:2; Acts 16:19-24)

2. What three things did Paul say his message did not come from? (2:3)

3. Whom was Paul trying to please when he spoke, and why? (2:4)

4. What two family pictures does Paul use to describe how he treated the Thessalonians? (2:7, 11)

5. Why did Paul work night and day while he was in Thessalonica? (2:9)

6. How did the Thessalonians receive Paul's message, and what does God's word do in those who believe? (2:13)

7. What did Paul say his hope, joy, and crown would be at the Lord's coming? (2:19-20)

8. Who are you most tempted to please, people or God? What would change if you lived to please God first? (2:4)

9. Paul shared not only the gospel but his own life. Who could you share your life with this month? (2:8)

10. When you face a closed door or a delay in serving God, how do you respond? (2:18)

1 Thessalonians 3: Timothy's Good Report

Scripture

3:1-13 Therefore, no longer enduring ***it***, we thought it good to be left behind in Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and servant of God and our fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen you and to encourage you concerning your faith, that no one be shaken by these tribulations; for you yourselves know that we are appointed for this. For indeed, when we were with you, we were telling you beforehand that we were about to be afflicted, just as it also came to pass, and you know. Because of this I also, no longer enduring ***it***, sent to know your faith, lest somehow the one who tempts had tempted you, and our labor should be in vain. But now, Timothy having come to us from you and having brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have a good remembrance of us, longing to see us, just as we also ***long to see*** you, because of this we were encouraged, brothers, over you in all our tribulation and distress through your faith; for now we live, if you stand firm in ***the*** Lord. For what thanksgiving are we able to render to God concerning you, for all the joy ***with*** which we rejoice because of you before our God, night and day praying most exceedingly to see your face and to complete the things lacking in your faith? Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way to you; and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love toward one another and toward all, just as we also ***do*** toward you, so as to strengthen your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Preview

Paul could not go back to Thessalonica himself, but he could not stand waiting any longer either. So while he was in Athens, he sent Timothy back to strengthen the church and to find out how they were holding up. Paul was afraid that the tempter had gotten to them and that all his work had been for nothing. He had warned them while he was there that trouble was coming, and it came.

Then Timothy returned with good news. Their faith and love were strong, and they still thought warmly of Paul and longed to see him. Paul says that news brought him back to life. He pours out his thanks to God and tells them he prays night and day to see them again. The chapter closes with a prayer: that the Lord would make their love grow and would strengthen their hearts to be blameless in holiness at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Study

3:1 *Therefore, no longer enduring **it**, we thought it good to be left behind in Athens alone,*

"Therefore, no longer enduring it." The word Paul uses means to hold something in, like a roof keeps out the rain. Paul had held in his worry as long as he could. He could not hold it in any longer.

"We thought it good to be left behind in Athens alone." Athens was the most famous city of learning in the ancient world, and it was full of idols (Acts 17:16). It was not an easy place to be by yourself. Paul felt it deeply. But he was willing to be alone in a hard place so that the Thessalonians could have help.

Love sometimes means giving up the comfort we want so that others can have what they need.

3:2 *and we sent Timothy, our brother and servant of God and our fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen you and to encourage you concerning your faith,*

"And we sent Timothy, our brother and servant of God and our fellow worker in the gospel of Christ." Paul gives Timothy three titles. He is "our brother," part of the family. He is a "servant of God," one who serves God and answers to Him. And he is a "fellow worker in the gospel of Christ," a partner in the work, not just an assistant.

Why so many titles? Timothy was young (1 Timothy 4:12). Paul wanted the church to receive him with the same respect they gave Paul.

Timothy's job was "to strengthen you and to encourage you concerning your faith." To strengthen means to set something firmly in place, like putting a support under a wall. To encourage means to come alongside and urge someone on. New believers need both. They need a firm foundation, and they need someone beside them saying, "Keep going." Is there a newer believer you could strengthen and encourage this week?

3:3 *that no one be shaken by these tribulations; for you yourselves know that we are appointed for this.*

"That no one be shaken by these tribulations." The word shaken was used for a dog wagging its tail, and then for someone being flattered or charmed away from what they believe. Paul was worried that the troubles they faced, or the smooth words of their enemies, would move them off their faith.

"For you yourselves know that we are appointed for this." Trouble for believers is not an accident. It is part of the Christian life in a fallen world. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33), and Paul told new believers in other cities "that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

This does not mean the church will go through the future seven-year Tribulation. The tribulations here are the ordinary troubles and persecution God's people face in every age because the world hates Christ (John 15:18-20). That is very different from the wrath God will pour out on the earth in the day of the Lord, which Paul says we are not appointed for (5:9). God appoints His people to suffer for Christ at times. He does not appoint us to His wrath.

3:4 *For indeed, when we were with you, we were telling you beforehand that we were about to be afflicted, just as it also came to pass, and you know.*

"For indeed, when we were with you, we were telling you beforehand that we were about to be afflicted." Paul did not sell the gospel to these people with promises of an easy life. He told them up front that following Jesus would bring trouble. "Just as it also came to pass, and you know."

This is a good lesson for how we share our faith. Some people are told that if they come to Jesus, all their problems will go away. Then trouble comes, and they think God has failed them. Jesus told His followers to count the cost (Luke 14:27-28). Paul did the same. Because he told them ahead of time, the trouble did not catch them by surprise. It actually confirmed that what he taught was true.

3:5 *Because of this I also, no longer enduring **it**, sent to know your faith, lest somehow the one who tempts had tempted you, and our labor should be in vain.*

"Because of this I also, no longer enduring it, sent to know your faith." Paul repeats what he said in verse 1, but this time he speaks for himself alone. This was his own heart's burden.

What was he afraid of? "Lest somehow the one who tempts had tempted you, and our labor should be in vain." The one who tempts is Satan (Matthew 4:3). Paul already said Satan had hindered him from coming (2:18). Now he worried that Satan might use the suffering to pull the young believers away.

Satan's plan has not changed. He uses pressure and trouble to try to get believers to doubt God and give up. Peter warns us that "your adversary, the devil, walks around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). But Paul's fear was not the end of the story. The next verse shows that God had kept them.

3:6 *But now, Timothy having come to us from you and having brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have a good remembrance of us, longing to see us, just as we also **long to see** you,*

"But now, Timothy having come to us from you." This takes us to Corinth, where Silas and Timothy caught up with Paul (Acts 18:5). Timothy "brought us good news of your faith and love." The word Paul uses for brought good news is the same word usually used for preaching the gospel. To Paul, hearing that these believers were standing firm was like hearing the gospel all over again.

Notice what Timothy reported. Their faith, meaning their trust in God, was holding. Their love, meaning their care for each other and for others, was strong. And he reported "that you always have a good remembrance of us, longing to see us." Paul's enemies had not turned the church against him. They loved him and wanted to see him, "just as we also long to see you."

3:7 *because of this we were encouraged, brothers, over you in all our tribulation and distress through your faith;*

"Because of this we were encouraged, brothers, over you in all our tribulation and distress through your faith;" Paul was going through his own hard time in Corinth. Distress means being pressed by need, and tribulation means pressure from outside. He was working with his hands, facing opposition from the synagogue (Acts 18:6), and carrying the care of the churches.

And what encouraged him? Their faith. Paul had sent Timothy to encourage them, and their faith ended up encouraging him. That is how the body of Christ works. When you stay faithful in hard times, you never know who is being strengthened by it. Your faithfulness may be the thing that keeps someone else going.

3:8 *for now we live, if you stand firm in **the** Lord.*

"For now we live, if you stand firm in the Lord." This is a strong way to say it. Paul had been carrying such a weight of worry that it felt like death. Now he can breathe again. Their faithfulness gave him new life.

To "stand firm" means to hold your ground, like a soldier who will not give up his position. And they stand "in the Lord." We do not stand firm by our own strength. We stand in Him. The word if here is not a doubt. It is a reminder. As long as they keep standing in the Lord, Paul's joy is full. Faithful believers bring life to those who serve them. Pastors and teachers know what Paul felt here.

3:9 *For what thanksgiving are we able to render to God concerning you, for all the joy **with** which we rejoice because of you before our God,*

"For what thanksgiving are we able to render to God concerning you." Paul cannot find enough thanks to give. He is overflowing.

Notice again where the thanks go. Not to the Thessalonians, but to God. Paul knew that their standing firm was God's work in them. He rejoices "for all the joy with which we rejoice because of you before our God." His joy is "before our God." It is the kind of joy you bring into God's presence and lay before Him in praise.

Do you thank God when you hear that other believers are doing well? It is easy to share bad news about people. Paul shows us the joy of sharing good news and turning it into praise.

3:10 *night and day praying most exceedingly to see your face and to complete the things lacking in your faith?*

"Night and day praying most exceedingly to see your face." Paul's prayers were not short or casual. Night and day, and "most exceedingly," which means beyond all measure, over and above. He prayed with everything he had.

What did he pray for? Two things. To "see your face," to be with them again. And "to complete the things lacking in your faith." Their faith was real and strong, but it was not finished. They had only been believers for a few months, and Paul had not had time to teach them everything. The word complete was used for mending fishing nets and for setting broken bones. Paul wanted to fill in the gaps.

One of those gaps was their understanding of what happens to believers who die before the Lord comes. Paul will fill that gap in chapter 4. Every believer has things lacking in their faith. That is not a shame. It is a reason to keep growing in God's Word.

3:11 *Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way to you;*

Now Paul turns from telling them about his prayers to praying right there in the letter. "Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way to you."

Notice something here. Paul names God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ together, and then the verb for direct in the Greek is singular. Paul thinks of the Father and the Son acting as one. That is one of the many places where Scripture shows that Jesus is God, equal with the Father.

Paul asked God to clear the road that Satan had blocked (2:18). Did God answer? Yes. Some years later Paul did come back to Macedonia (Acts 20:1-2). God answers prayer in His own time.

3:12 *and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love toward one another and toward all, just as we also **do** toward you,*

"And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love toward one another and toward all." Paul asks for more love, and then more on top of that. To increase means to grow. To abound means to overflow, to have more than enough.

Their love goes in two directions: "toward one another," their fellow believers, and "toward all," which includes their neighbors, even the ones persecuting them. Jesus told us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). That kind of love does not come naturally. It comes from the Lord, which is why Paul prays for it.

"Just as we also do toward you." Paul does not ask them to do anything he is not already doing. His love for them was the model.

3:13 *so as to strengthen your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*

Why does Paul pray for their love to grow? "So as to strengthen your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."

Love and holiness go together. As our love for God and others grows, our hearts are made strong and steady, and our lives become more holy. Holiness means being set apart for God, different from the world. Blameless does not mean we will be perfect in this life. It means living so that no

one can bring a fair charge against us, and one day standing before God with nothing held against us because of Christ (Colossians 1:22).

Notice the day Paul has in view: "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." Again Paul ends a chapter with the Lord's return. Here Jesus comes with His saints. The word saints means holy ones. Some teachers believe it means angels, as in Zechariah 14:5 and Matthew 25:31. Many others believe it means believers, or believers along with angels. In the pre-tribulation view, this points to Christ's return to the earth at the end of the Tribulation, when His people come with Him (Jude 14; Revelation 19:14). How can they come with Him if they are not already with Him? Because He will have come for them first at the rapture, which Paul is about to describe in 4:13-18. He comes for His saints before the Tribulation, and He comes with His saints at the end of it.

Either way, the point for us is clear. We should live now in a way we will be glad of when we stand before Him.

Old Testament links: Zechariah 14:5 (alluded to)

Summary

Unable to wait any longer, Paul stayed alone in Athens and sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians, so that no one would be shaken by the troubles believers are appointed to face. Paul had warned them that trouble was coming, and he feared that the tempter had pulled them away. Timothy returned with good news of their faith and love and their longing to see Paul. That news encouraged Paul in his own distress and made him feel alive again. He thanks God with overflowing joy and prays night and day to see them and complete what is lacking in their faith. Paul closes with a prayer that God the Father and the Lord Jesus would open the way for him, make their love overflow toward one another and toward all, and strengthen their hearts blameless in holiness at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Study Questions

1. Why did Paul send Timothy back to Thessalonica, and what did he want Timothy to do? (3:1-2)

2. What had Paul told the Thessalonians about trouble while he was with them? (3:3-4)

3. Who is "the one who tempts," and what was Paul afraid he might do? (3:5)

4. What good news did Timothy bring back? (3:6)

5. How did the Thessalonians' faith affect Paul in his own hard time? (3:7-8)

6. What two things did Paul pray for night and day? (3:10)

7. What did Paul ask the Lord to do for the Thessalonians, and why? (3:12-13)

8. How is the trouble believers face in this world different from the wrath of the day of the Lord? (3:3; 5:9)

9. Is there a newer believer you could strengthen and encourage the way Timothy did? (3:2)

10. If the Lord Jesus came today, would your heart be strong and blameless in holiness? What would you want to change? (3:13)

1 Thessalonians 4: Holy Living and the Coming of the Lord

Scripture

4:1-18 Finally then, brothers, we ask you and exhort ***you*** in ***the*** Lord Jesus, just as you received from us how you must walk and please God, that you abound more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is ***the*** will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know ***how*** to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in ***the*** passion of lust, just as also the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one go beyond and take advantage of his brother in the matter, because the Lord ***is*** an avenger concerning all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly testified. For God did not call us to impurity, but in sanctification. So then, the one who rejects ***this*** does not reject man but God, who also gave His Holy Spirit to us. Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need ***for me*** to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do it toward all the brothers who ***are*** in all Macedonia. But we exhort you, brothers, to abound more, and to aspire to live quietly and to attend to your own ***affairs*** and to work with your own hands, just as we commanded you, so that you may walk properly toward those outside and may have need of nothing. But I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve, just as also the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. For this we say to you in ***the*** word of ***the*** Lord, that we who are living, who remain until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep; because the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with ***the*** voice of an archangel and with ***the*** trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are living, who remain, will be caught away together with them in ***the*** clouds to meet the Lord in ***the*** air; and so we will always be with ***the*** Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Preview

With chapter 4 Paul turns from looking back to looking ahead. He has thanked God for the Thessalonians and opened his heart to them. Now he begins to fill in what is lacking in their faith (3:10). First he calls them to keep growing in a life that pleases God. God's will is their sanctification, and that means sexual purity, holding their own bodies in holiness and honor, not in lust like those who do not know God. Then he urges them to love one another more and more, to live quietly, to mind their own business, and to work with their own hands, so that outsiders would respect them and they would not depend on anyone.

In the second half, Paul answers a question that was breaking their hearts. Some believers in the church had died. Would they miss out when the Lord came? Paul tells them not to grieve like people with no hope. Because Jesus died and rose again, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. The Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a shout, the dead in Christ will rise first, and then believers who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. This is the passage many call the rapture of the church, and Paul gives it to us for one reason: to encourage one another.

Study

4:1 *Finally then, brothers, we ask you and exhort **you** in **the** Lord Jesus, just as you received from us how you must walk and please God, that you abound more.*

"Finally then, brothers." Paul is not about to end the letter. The word finally here means something like now then, or as for the rest. He is moving on to the next part.

"We ask you and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, just as you received from us how you must walk and please God, that you abound more." Paul had already taught them how to live while he was with them. They received it, and they had started living it. He is not scolding them. He is urging them to keep going and grow even more.

Notice the goal of the Christian life: to "please God." We do not live holy lives to earn God's love. We already have it. We live to please the One who saved us, the way a child who knows he is loved wants to make his father glad. And there is always room to grow. No believer ever reaches the point where he has arrived.

4:2 *For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.*

"For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus." The word instructions was used for orders passed down the line in an army. These were not Paul's personal opinions or suggestions. They came "through the Lord Jesus," with His authority.

That matters for what comes next. In a city like Thessalonica, sexual freedom was normal, and many would have seen Paul's teaching on purity as old-fashioned or extreme. Paul reminds them that this is not his rule. It is the Lord's. When God's Word speaks on something, it is not up to us to vote on it.

4:3 *For this is **the** will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;*

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification." People often ask what God's will is for their lives. Here is a clear answer. God's will is your sanctification. Sanctification means being made holy, set apart for God and made more like Christ. It begins the moment we believe, and it continues all through our lives as the Holy Spirit works in us.

And Paul gets specific: "that you abstain from sexual immorality." The Greek word is porneia. It covers every kind of sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman. To abstain means to keep away from it completely, not to see how close we can get.

In the Greek and Roman world, sexual sin was everywhere and was often part of pagan worship itself. It is not much different today. God's call to purity was hard for the Thessalonians, and it is hard for us. But it is His will, and He gives the power to obey it.

4:4-5 *that each of you know **how** to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in **the** passion of lust, just as also the Gentiles who do not know God;*

"That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." Bible teachers read the word vessel in two main ways. Many believe it means a person's own body, as Paul uses the word in 2 Corinthians 4:7, and that Paul is saying each believer must learn to control his own body. Others believe it means a wife, as Peter speaks of the wife "as with a weaker vessel" (1 Peter 3:7), and that Paul is saying each man should take a wife in holiness and honor rather than in lust. Both readings lead to the same place. Sexual desire is to be governed by holiness and honor.

"Not in the passion of lust, just as also the Gentiles who do not know God." Here Gentiles means the pagan world, people who did not know the true God. Their sexual lives were driven by passion and lust, because they did not know a holy God who made them and owns them. Believers do know Him. That changes everything about how we treat our bodies and other people's bodies (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

Notice that Paul says each must "know how to possess his own vessel." Self-control is something we learn. If you have struggled in this area, do not give up. Ask God for help, and get help from mature believers you can trust.

4:6 *that no one go beyond and take advantage of his brother in the matter, because the Lord **is** an avenger concerning all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly testified.*

"That no one go beyond and take advantage of his brother in the matter." To go beyond means to cross a line, to trespass. To take advantage means to grab more than what is yours. Sexual sin always wrongs someone else. It takes from another person what belongs to God, to their future spouse, or to their present spouse. Some teachers read "the matter" as business dealings, a new subject. But most see Paul still talking about sexual sin, which fits the verses before and after.

"Because the Lord is an avenger concerning all these things." An avenger is one who brings justice for a wrong done. People may hide sexual sin from others, but not from God. He sees, and He will judge. Paul says he had already "told you before and solemnly testified" about this. He was not saying anything new. He was reminding them, because this is a truth we need to hear more than once.

4:7 *For God did not call us to impurity, but in sanctification.*

"For God did not call us to impurity, but in sanctification." When God called us to Himself through the gospel, He did not call us to stay as we were. He called us to holiness. Impurity is the opposite of being set apart for God. It is moral dirt.

This is a good verse to remember when temptation comes. You were not saved to live like that anymore. God has called you to something better. Peter says the same thing: we are to be holy because the God who called us is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).

4:8 *So then, the one who rejects **this** does not reject man but God, who also gave His Holy Spirit to us.*

"So then, the one who rejects this does not reject man but God." Some people in Thessalonica may have brushed off Paul's teaching on sexual purity as one man's opinion. Paul says that is not possible. If you reject this teaching, you are not just disagreeing with Paul. You are rejecting God.

"Who also gave His Holy Spirit to us." The Holy Spirit lives in every believer. And look at His name: Holy. To live in sexual sin is to drag the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, into it (1 Corinthians 6:19). That is why purity matters so much. But the Spirit is also the One who gives us power to live pure lives (Galatians 5:16). We are not left to fight on our own.

4:9 *Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need **for me** to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;*

"Now concerning brotherly love." The Greek word is philadelphia, the love of brothers and sisters for each other. Paul uses it here for the love believers have for one another as members of God's family.

"You have no need for me to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another." What a compliment. They were "taught by God." The Holy Spirit had planted love in their hearts. Jesus said that love for one another would be the mark of His followers (John 13:34-35). When God saves someone, He gives them a new love for His people. If you find that you have no love for other believers, that is a warning sign to take seriously (1 John 3:14).

4:10 *for indeed you do it toward all the brothers who **are** in all Macedonia. But we exhort you, brothers, to abound more,*

"For indeed you do it toward all the brothers who are in all Macedonia." The Thessalonians' love reached beyond their own church to believers in other cities, such as Philippi and Berea. They may have welcomed traveling believers, given help to those in need, or sent gifts. Their love was not just a feeling. It went somewhere.

"But we exhort you, brothers, to abound more." Paul praises them, and then he asks for more. Love is never finished. There is no point where we can say we have loved enough. This is the same word Paul used in 3:12 and 4:1. Keep growing. Keep overflowing.

4:11 *and to aspire to live quietly and to attend to your own **affairs** and to work with your own hands, just as we commanded you,*

"And to aspire to live quietly." Paul uses a play on words here. The word aspire means to be ambitious, to strive for honor. Paul is telling them to be ambitious to be quiet. Strive hard to live a calm, settled life.

"And to attend to your own affairs." Mind your own business. Do not be a busybody in other people's lives.

"And to work with your own hands, just as we commanded you." The Greeks often looked down on hand labor as fit only for slaves. Paul did not. He worked with his own hands (2:9), and he told them to do the same.

Why did Paul need to say this? It seems that some in the church had stopped working. Some may have thought the Lord's coming was so near that there was no point in working. Others may simply have been taking advantage of the generosity of the church. Paul will deal with this more strongly in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. Waiting for Jesus never means quitting our jobs. The best way to wait for Him is to be found faithful at our work (Luke 12:42-43).

4:12 *so that you may walk properly toward those outside and may have need of nothing.*

"So that you may walk properly toward those outside." "Those outside" means people who are not believers. The way we work and live is a witness to them. If believers are lazy, nosy, or always asking for money, the world will look down on the church and on Christ.

"And may have need of nothing." A believer who works can take care of himself and his family, and even have something left to give to others (Ephesians 4:28). That is a good testimony. It shows that following Jesus makes a person more responsible, not less.

Paul's teaching on love in verses 9-12 is very practical. Love is shown in quiet faithfulness, minding our own business, and doing honest work.

4:13 *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve, just as also the rest who have no hope.*

Now Paul turns to a new subject, one that was breaking hearts in Thessalonica. "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep." When Paul says "I do not want you to be ignorant," he is about to teach something important (Romans 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1).

"Those who have fallen asleep" are believers who have died. Jesus Himself used this picture when He said, "Lazarus our friend has fallen asleep" (John 11:11). Why sleep? Because death for a believer is not the end. Sleep is something you wake up from. The picture speaks of the body, which lies in the grave until the resurrection. It does not mean the soul is unconscious. Paul says that to be "absent out of the body" is "to be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8), and that to depart is "to be with Christ" (Philippians 1:23).

Some believers in Thessalonica had died since Paul left. The others were grieving, and they may have been afraid that those who died would miss the Lord's coming. Paul writes "so that you may not grieve, just as also the rest who have no hope."

Notice that Paul does not tell them to stop grieving. He tells them not to grieve like those who have no hope. Grief is normal. Jesus wept at Lazarus's tomb (John 11:35). But believers grieve differently. The pagan world had little or no hope beyond death. We have a sure hope, and Paul is about to tell us what it is. If you have lost someone who knew the Lord, these verses are for you.

4:14 *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.*

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again." The word if here does not mean Paul is unsure. It means since. We believe Jesus died and rose. That is the heart of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Notice something. Paul says that Jesus died. He does not say Jesus fell asleep. Jesus faced the full weight of death for us, including the judgment for our sins. Because He did, death for the believer has become sleep.

"So also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus." Here is the hope. Just as surely as Jesus rose, God will raise those who belong to Him. Their resurrection is tied to His (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

"Will bring with Him." When Jesus comes, the souls of believers who have died will come with Him from heaven. Then, as Paul explains in verse 16, their bodies will be raised and joined to their souls. The ones the Thessalonians were grieving were not lost. They were with Jesus, and they would come back with Him.

4:15 *For this we say to you in **the** word of **the** Lord, that we who are living, who remain until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep;*

"For this we say to you in the word of the Lord." Paul is not guessing or giving his opinion. This is "the word of the Lord." It may be a saying of Jesus that the apostles passed on, or something the risen Lord revealed directly to Paul (Galatians 1:11-12). Either way, it carries the full authority of Christ.

"That we who are living, who remain until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep." To precede means to go before, to get ahead of. Living believers will not have any advantage over believers who have died. "By no means" is a strong double negative in the Greek. It will absolutely not happen.

Notice that Paul says "we who are living." Paul included himself among those who might be alive when Jesus came. He did not know when it would be. He did not say Jesus would surely come in his lifetime, and he did not say Jesus surely would not. He lived as though it could happen at any time. Bible teachers call this imminence. Imminent means it could happen at any moment, with no other event that must come first. I believe this is one of the strong reasons for seeing the rapture as before the Tribulation. Paul gives no signs that must happen first. He simply tells believers to be ready.

4:16 *because the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with **the** voice of an archangel and with **the** trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first;*

Now Paul tells us how it will happen. "Because the Lord Himself will descend from heaven." Not an angel. Not a messenger. "The Lord Himself." Jesus promised, "I am coming again and will

receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you also may be" (John 14:3). He will keep that promise in person.

His coming will be announced three ways. First, "with a shout of command." The word was used for the order an officer shouts to his troops, or a captain to the rowers on a ship. It is a word of authority. Jesus once shouted at a tomb, "Lazarus, come out" (John 11:43). One day He will give the command, and all His people will rise.

Second, "with the voice of an archangel." An archangel is a chief angel. The only one named in Scripture is Michael (Jude 9). Paul does not tell us what the archangel will say.

Third, "with the trumpet of God." In the Old Testament, trumpets called God's people to gather and to move out (Numbers 10:1-10). Paul speaks of this same trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52, where he calls it "the last trumpet" and says the dead will be raised in "the blink of an eye." This is not the same as the seven trumpets of judgment in Revelation 8-11. Those trumpets bring judgment on the earth. This trumpet calls the church home.

"And the dead in Christ will rise first." This answers the Thessalonians' worry. The believers who have died will not miss out. In fact, they go first. Their bodies will rise from the grave, raised new and incorruptible, and joined to their souls.

4:17 *then we who are living, who remain, will be caught away together with them in* ***the*** *clouds to meet the Lord in* ***the*** *air; and so we will always be with* ***the*** *Lord.*

"Then we who are living, who remain, will be caught away together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

Here is the heart of the passage. The words "caught away" translate the Greek word harpazo. It means to seize suddenly, to snatch away by force, to carry off quickly. It is used of the Spirit snatching Philip away (Acts 8:39) and of a child being caught up to God's throne (Revelation 12:5). When the early church's Bible was translated into Latin, this word was rendered with a form of the Latin verb rapio, and from that we get our English word rapture. The word may not be in our English Bibles, but the event is here.

Think about what Paul is saying. The dead in Christ rise. Then living believers, in an instant, are snatched up "together with them." There is a reunion. Those who were grieving at gravesides will meet their loved ones again, in new bodies, in the clouds. And they will "meet the Lord in the air." Jesus does not come all the way down to the earth at this time. He meets His people in the air.

Some Bible teachers point out that the Greek word for meet was used for a group going out from a city to welcome an important visitor and walk back with him into the city. They believe this shows that believers rise to meet Christ and then come right back down with Him to the earth, so that the rapture and His Second Coming are one event at the end of the Tribulation. Others place the rapture in the middle of the Tribulation, or shortly before the worst of God's wrath. I respect those who hold these views. But I believe the plain teaching of Scripture is that this catching away comes before the seven-year Tribulation. Here is why.

First, the word for meet does not by itself tell us which way the group goes afterward, and Jesus told us what happens next. He said He would receive us to Himself and take us to the place He has prepared in His Father's house (John 14:2-3). Second, Paul gives no signs that must come first. He describes an event that could happen at any time (4:15). Third, Paul's next words tell us the day of the Lord will fall on an unbelieving world like a thief, but "God did not appoint us for wrath" (5:9). Fourth, Jesus promised the church, "I also will keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole inhabited world" (Revelation 3:10). Fifth, look at the comfort Paul gives in verse 18. If the Thessalonians had to go through the Tribulation first, the most important thing to tell them would be how to get ready for it. Instead, Paul tells them to look up.

Then the Tribulation will come on the earth. At its end, Christ will return visibly to the earth with His saints (3:13; Revelation 19:11-16) to judge and to set up His thousand-year kingdom (Revelation 20:1-6).

"And so we will always be with the Lord." This is the best part. The rapture is not mainly about escaping. It is about being with Jesus. From that moment on, we will never be apart from Him. Wherever He goes, we go. Forever.

4:18 *Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

"Therefore encourage one another with these words." This is why Paul wrote these verses. Not to start arguments, not to make charts, but to encourage. The word means to comfort, to come alongside someone and strengthen them.

Picture a believer in Thessalonica standing at the grave of a husband or a child. What does he need to hear? That the Lord Himself is coming. That the dead in Christ will rise first. That we will be caught away together with them. That we will always be with the Lord. Those are words of real comfort, because they are true.

Notice that Paul expects believers to share this comfort with each other. "Encourage one another." When someone in your church loses a loved one who knew Jesus, these are the words to share. Read them at a funeral. Read them at a hospital bed. Read them to yourself on a hard night.

Are you ready for that day? If you know Jesus, this is your hope. If you do not know Him yet, today is the day to turn to Him (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Summary

Paul urges the Thessalonians to keep growing in a life that pleases God, following the instructions he gave them through the Lord Jesus. God's will is their sanctification: they are to abstain from sexual immorality, keep their bodies in holiness and honor, and not wrong one another in this matter, because the Lord avenges such sins and has called us to holiness. To reject this is to reject God, who gives us His Holy Spirit. They already love one another, and Paul urges them to love more, to live quietly, mind their own affairs, and work with their own hands, so that outsiders respect them and they depend on no one. Then Paul comforts them about believers who have died. Because Jesus died and rose again, God will bring them with Him. The Lord Himself will

descend from heaven with a shout, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ will rise first, and then living believers will be caught away together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. They are to encourage one another with these words.

Study Questions

1. What does Paul say is the will of God for every believer? (4:3)

2. Why is rejecting God's teaching on sexual purity more serious than disagreeing with a man? (4:8)

3. What three things did Paul tell the Thessalonians to aspire to, and why? (4:11-12)

4. What does Paul mean by "those who have fallen asleep"? (4:13-14)

5. What three sounds will announce the Lord's coming? (4:16)

6. In what order will the dead in Christ and living believers meet the Lord? (4:16-17)

7. What reasons does this study give for believing the catching away comes before the Tribulation? (4:15-17; 5:9)

8. How is a believer's grief different from the grief of "the rest who have no hope"? (4:13)

9. Is there an area of your life where you need God's help to live in holiness and honor? (4:3-7)

10. Who do you know who is grieving, and how could you encourage them with these words this week? (4:18)

1 Thessalonians 5: The Day of the Lord and Final Instructions

Scripture

5:1-11 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need ***that anything*** be written to you; for you yourselves know accurately that the day of ***the*** Lord comes in this way, as a thief in ***the*** night. For when they say, "Peace and security," then sudden destruction comes upon them, as the labor pain ***upon*** the pregnant woman, and they will by no means escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness, so that the day would overtake you like a thief; you are all sons of light and sons of day; we are not of night nor of darkness. So then let us not sleep, as the rest also ***do***, but let us keep watch and be sober. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But we, being of ***the*** day, let us be sober, having put on ***the*** breastplate of faith and love, and ***as*** a helmet ***the*** hope of salvation; because God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we keep watch or sleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

5:12-28 But we ask you, brothers, to know those who labor among you and lead you in ***the*** Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them most exceedingly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brothers: admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient toward all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always pursue what ***is*** good, both toward one another and toward all. Rejoice always. Pray unceasingly. In everything give thanks; for this ***is the*** will of God in Christ Jesus toward you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast the good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved whole, blamelessly, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful ***is*** the One who calls you, who also will do ***it***. Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I charge you by the Lord ***that*** the letter be read to all the holy brothers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ***be*** with you. Amen.

Preview

Paul has just told the Thessalonians about the Lord's coming for His people. Now he turns to the day of the Lord, the time when God will pour out His judgment on an unbelieving world. The Thessalonians already knew it would come without warning, like a thief in the night. When the world is saying "Peace and security," sudden destruction will come upon them, and they will not escape. But believers are not in darkness. We are sons of light and sons of day. So we are to stay awake and sober, wearing faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet, because God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the second half of the chapter, Paul gives a string of short commands for church life. Respect your leaders. Live at peace. Warn the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and

be patient with everyone. Do not pay back evil for evil. Rejoice always, pray without stopping, and give thanks in everything. Do not quench the Spirit or despise prophecies, but test all things. Then Paul prays that the God of peace would make them holy through and through and keep them blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

Study

5:1 *Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need* ***that anything*** *be written to you;*

"Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers." The Thessalonians had questions about when these things would happen. The word times speaks of the length of time, how long. The word seasons speaks of the kind of time, the right moment or the character of an era. Jesus used the same two words when He told His disciples, just before He went up to heaven, that it was not for them to know the times or seasons the Father has set by His own authority (Acts 1:7).

"You have no need that anything be written to you." Paul had already taught them this while he was with them. Just as with brotherly love (4:9), he reminds them of what they already know rather than giving them something new.

Notice the change. In 4:13-18 Paul taught them something they did not know: what happens to believers who have died when the Lord comes for His church. Now he moves to something they did know: the day of the Lord. The words "now concerning" mark a new subject, as they do in 4:9. I believe this is important. The rapture and the day of the Lord are related, but they are not the same event.

5:2 *for you yourselves know accurately that the day of* ***the*** *Lord comes in this way, as a thief in* ***the*** *night.*

"For you yourselves know accurately that the day of the Lord comes in this way, as a thief in the night."

What is the day of the Lord? It is a phrase the Old Testament prophets used often. It means the time when God steps into history to judge sin and set things right. Amos warned that "the day of the LORD" is "darkness and not light" (Amos 5:18). Zephaniah called it "a day of fury," "a day of trouble and distress" (Zephaniah 1:15). Joel said the sun would turn to darkness and the moon to blood before "the great and awesome day of the LORD" comes (Joel 2:31).

In the pre-tribulation view this study follows, the day of the Lord in its future sense includes the whole period of God's judgment on the earth, the seven-year Tribulation, along with Christ's return to the earth at its end and the kingdom that follows. It begins with judgment and ends with blessing.

How does it come? "As a thief in the night." A thief does not send a letter ahead of time. He comes when people are asleep and not expecting him. Jesus used the same picture (Matthew 24:43), and so did Peter: "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (2 Peter 3:10). The day of the Lord will catch the world by surprise.

5:3 *For when they say, "Peace and security," then sudden destruction comes upon them, as the labor pain* ***upon*** *the pregnant woman, and they will by no means escape.*

"For when they say, Peace and security, then sudden destruction comes upon them." Notice the pronouns. They. Them. Paul is not talking about believers here. He is talking about the unbelieving world.

The world will think everything is fine. People will be talking about peace and security. Some scholars think this may echo slogans the Roman Empire used about the peace it brought to the world. However that may be, it describes a world that feels safe without God. Then "sudden destruction" comes. Destruction here does not mean being wiped out of existence. It means ruin, the loss of everything that makes life worth living.

"As the labor pain upon the pregnant woman." A pregnant woman knows her baby is coming, but she does not know the exact hour when labor will start. When it starts, it cannot be stopped, and it grows stronger. Jesus used the same picture for the signs before His return (Matthew 24:8). "And they will by no means escape." The double negative again. There will be no way out for those who have rejected God.

5:4 *But you, brothers, are not in darkness, so that the day would overtake you like a thief;*

"But you, brothers, are not in darkness, so that the day would overtake you like a thief." Now the pronoun changes. They and them become you. The world is in darkness. Believers are not.

Why will that day not overtake believers like a thief? Two reasons. First, we know it is coming and what it will be like. We are not in the dark about God's plan. Second, I believe Scripture teaches that the church will not be on the earth when that day begins. Jesus will come for His church first, as Paul just described (4:16-17), and then the day of the Lord will fall on the world.

A thief only surprises those who are not ready. Believers are watching for the Lord Jesus, not for a thief. The world is not.

5:5 *you are all sons of light and sons of day; we are not of night nor of darkness.*

"You are all sons of light and sons of day." To be a son of something, in the Bible's way of speaking, means to be marked by it, to belong to it. Believers belong to the light. Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12), and when we came to Him He brought us out of darkness into His light (Colossians 1:13; 1 Peter 2:9).

Notice that Paul says "you are all." Not just the strong believers or the mature ones. Every believer belongs to the day.

"We are not of night nor of darkness." Paul switches from you to we. He includes himself. The night and the darkness belong to those who do not know God. This is not just about knowing more facts. It is about who we are. We are people of the day, and so the day of the Lord is not a day of wrath for us.

5:6 *So then let us not sleep, as the rest also **do**, but let us keep watch and be sober.*

"So then let us not sleep, as the rest also do, but let us keep watch and be sober." Now Paul tells us how people of the day should live. The word sleep here is a different word from the one used for death in 4:13-15. Here it means being spiritually careless, unaware, drowsy, the way people are who do not expect the Lord.

"Keep watch" means to stay awake and alert, like a guard on duty at night. "Be sober" means to be clear-headed and self-controlled, not drunk on the pleasures or worries of this world.

Our hope in the Lord's coming is not meant to make us lazy or careless. It is meant to keep us awake. Are you living as though Jesus could come today?

5:7 *For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.*

"For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night." Paul states something everyone knows. People sleep at night. In those days, people who got drunk mostly did it at night too. The night was the time for sleeping and for sin done in the dark.

Paul uses these plain facts as a picture. Spiritual sleep and spiritual drunkenness belong to the night, to the world that does not know God. It makes sense for the world to live that way. It does not make sense for us. Paul makes the same point in Romans 13:11-14: the night is far gone and the day is near, so let us lay aside the works of darkness.

5:8 *But we, being of **the** day, let us be sober, having put on **the** breastplate of faith and love, and **as** a helmet **the** hope of salvation;*

"But we, being of the day, let us be sober." Since we belong to the day, we should live like it.

Then Paul uses a picture of a soldier's armor, as he does in Ephesians 6:13-17. Isaiah had described the Lord Himself putting on "a helmet of salvation on His head" (Isaiah 59:17). Here believers are to put on "the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation."

A breastplate covered the heart and the vital organs. Faith toward God and love toward others guard our hearts. A helmet protected the head. Hope protects our minds. Notice it is "the hope of salvation." We are already saved from the penalty of sin, but there is a part of our salvation still ahead: the day we will be with Christ in new bodies, free from sin forever (Romans 8:23-24; 13:11). That hope keeps our heads clear when the world around us is losing its mind.

Here again are faith, love, and hope, the same three Paul praised in 1:3.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 59:17 (alluded to)

5:9 *because God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

"Because God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is one of the most important verses in the letter. To appoint means to set, to destine, to place someone for a purpose. God did not set us for wrath. What wrath? In this context Paul has been talking about the day of the Lord, the time of sudden destruction that falls on the world (5:2-3). The wrath here includes the wrath of that day. It also includes the final wrath against sin (1:10).

I believe this verse is one of the strongest reasons to see the rapture coming before the Tribulation. The Tribulation is the time of God's wrath poured out on the earth (Revelation 6:16-17; 15:1). God has not appointed His church for that wrath. Instead He has appointed us "for obtaining salvation," and in this context that includes being delivered from that day by being caught away to meet the Lord (4:17).

Some teachers believe God will protect believers through the Tribulation, the way He protected Israel in Goshen during the plagues of Egypt, or that the wrath here means only the final judgment of the lost. Those are honest views held by good people. But Paul ties this promise to the day of the Lord in the verses just before, and he does not say God will keep us safe in the middle of His wrath. He says God did not appoint us for it.

And notice how it comes: "through our Lord Jesus Christ." Our rescue is not because we are better than other people. It is because of what Jesus did for us.

5:10 *who died for us, so that whether we keep watch or sleep, we may live together with Him.*

"Who died for us." Here is the heart of the gospel again. Jesus died in our place, for our sins. That is why we are not appointed for wrath. He took the wrath we deserved.

"So that whether we keep watch or sleep, we may live together with Him." The words here are the same as in verse 6, but Paul seems to use them the way he used sleep in chapter 4. Whether we are alive or have died when He comes, we will live together with Him. That brings us right back to the comfort of 4:13-18. Living believers and believers who have died will both be with the Lord.

Some teachers read it the other way, as meaning that even believers who are not as watchful as they should be will still be with Christ. Either way, our being with Him rests on His death for us, not on how well we have done.

"Together with Him." That is the goal. Not just escaping wrath, but being with Jesus forever.

5:11 *Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*

"Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing." This is almost the same as the end of chapter 4 (4:18). Again Paul tells us that the truth about the Lord's coming is meant to encourage.

To build up means to build a house, to strengthen something piece by piece. Believers are to build each other up. That means words and actions that help others grow stronger in faith.

"Just as you also are doing." Once again Paul praises them for what they are already doing and asks them to keep it up. We do not need to wait for the pastor to encourage people. Every believer can do this.

5:12 *But we ask you, brothers, to know those who labor among you and lead you in* ***the*** *Lord and admonish you,*

Now Paul gives a set of commands for life together in the church. "But we ask you, brothers, to know those who labor among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you."

Paul describes church leaders in three ways. They "labor among you," which means they work hard, to the point of weariness. They "lead you in the Lord," which means they stand in front, as guides and caretakers, under the Lord's authority. And they "admonish you," which means they warn and correct, putting sense into your mind. These were probably the elders of the church, men who were older in the faith and appointed to shepherd the flock (Acts 14:23).

To know them means more than knowing their names. It means to recognize them, to appreciate them, and to give them the respect their work deserves.

5:13 *and to esteem them most exceedingly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*

"And to esteem them most exceedingly in love because of their work." To esteem means to hold someone in high regard. Paul says "most exceedingly," the same strong word he used in 3:10. And it is to be "in love," not grudging respect but real affection.

Notice why: "because of their work." Not because of their personality or their title, but because of the work God has given them. Hebrews 13:17 says they "keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account." That is a heavy job. Do you pray for your pastor and your church leaders? Do you thank them?

"Be at peace among yourselves." Many church fights begin between leaders and members. Paul tells them to live in peace with each other.

5:14 *Now we exhort you, brothers: admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient toward all.*

"Now we exhort you, brothers." These commands are given to the whole church, not just to the leaders. Every believer has a part in caring for the others.

Paul names four kinds of people and how to help each one. "Admonish the disorderly." The word disorderly was used for a soldier who broke rank, out of step and out of line. Here it seems to mean those who were idle and would not work (4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-11). They need to be warned.

"Encourage the fainthearted." These are the timid and discouraged, those who are worn out or afraid, perhaps grieving or worried about the day of the Lord. They need comfort, not scolding.

"Help the weak." These may be weak in faith, weak in conscience, or weak in body. To help means to hold on to them, to support them.

"Be patient toward all." Every one of these people, and every other person, will test our patience at times. Love is patient (1 Corinthians 13:4). Notice the wisdom here. Not everyone needs the same thing. The idle need a warning, the fainthearted need comfort, the weak need support, and all of us need patience.

5:15 *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always pursue what **is** good, both toward one another and toward all.*

"See that no one repays anyone evil for evil." The Thessalonians were being persecuted. It would have been natural to want to strike back. Paul says no. Jesus taught the same thing (Matthew 5:38-45), and Paul wrote it again to the Romans: "Repaying no one evil for evil" (Romans 12:17).

"But always pursue what is good, both toward one another and toward all." It is not enough to hold back from revenge. We are to chase after good. Pursue is a strong word. It was used for hunting. We are to go after chances to do good, even to those who treat us badly.

Why can we do this? Because we know the Lord is the avenger (4:6). We do not have to settle the score. He will make things right in His time (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7). We are free to do good.

5:16-18 *Rejoice always. Pray unceasingly. In everything give thanks; for this **is the** will of God in Christ Jesus toward you.*

"Rejoice always. Pray unceasingly. In everything give thanks." These three short commands belong together. They are some of the shortest verses in the Bible, but some of the hardest to live.

"Rejoice always." How can anyone rejoice always, especially people under persecution? Because our joy is not based on our circumstances. It is based on the Lord, who never changes (Philippians 4:4). The Thessalonians had already received the word "with joy of the Holy Spirit" in the middle of trouble (1:6).

"Pray unceasingly." This does not mean we spend every minute on our knees. It means we live in an attitude of prayer, talking with God through the day, turning every worry and every joy into prayer (Philippians 4:6). Prayer should keep coming back all day long.

"In everything give thanks." Notice it says in everything, not for everything. We do not thank God for evil. But in every situation, we can find reasons to thank Him, because He is with us and He works all things for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

"For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you." Again, people want to know God's will. Here it is, in plain words. Rejoice, pray, and give thanks.

5:19-20 *Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies.*

"Do not quench the Spirit." To quench means to put out a fire. The Holy Spirit is often pictured as fire (Acts 2:3). We can dampen His work in us and in our churches by ignoring Him, resisting Him, or living in sin.

"Do not despise prophecies." To despise means to look down on, to treat as worthless. In the early church, before the New Testament was finished, God gave some believers the gift of prophecy, speaking a message from God to the church (1 Corinthians 14:3). Some in Thessalonica may have become suspicious of anything claiming to be a message from God, perhaps because of false claims about the day of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:2).

Bible teachers disagree about whether the gift of prophecy continues today. Some believe that gift ended when the New Testament was complete, and that today this verse calls us not to despise the preaching and teaching of God's written Word. Others believe the gift continues, and that this verse calls churches to make room for it while testing it carefully. Both agree on what comes next: test everything by God's Word.

5:21-22 *Test all things; hold fast the good. Abstain from every form of evil.*

"Test all things; hold fast the good." To test means to examine something to see if it is genuine, the way a metal worker tests gold. Paul does not say believe everything, and he does not say reject everything. He says test it. How? By the Scriptures, as the Bereans did (Acts 17:11), and by whether it honors Jesus as Lord (1 John 4:1-3).

Once you have tested something and found it good, "hold fast" to it. Hold on tight.

"Abstain from every form of evil." Whatever fails the test, stay away from it. The word form can mean every kind of evil, or every appearance of evil. Either way, Paul is telling us to keep far away from it. This is the same word for abstain he used about sexual sin in 4:3. Holiness is not just doing good. It is also staying away from evil.

5:23 *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved whole, blamelessly, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Now Paul closes with a prayer. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely." He has told them many things to do. But in the end, it is God who makes us holy. He is "the God of peace," the God who makes peace with us through Christ and gives peace to His people. To "sanctify you completely" means to make you holy through and through, in every part of your life.

"And may your spirit and soul and body be preserved whole, blamelessly." Paul names three parts of a person. Some Bible teachers believe this shows that people are made up of three parts: spirit, soul, and body. Others believe the soul and spirit are two ways of speaking of the same inner person, and that Paul is simply saying the whole person, inside and out. Either way, the point is clear. God wants to keep every part of us.

"At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." For the fifth time in this letter, Paul ends a section looking to the Lord's coming (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15-17). That is the day when our sanctification will be complete, when we will see Him and be like Him (1 John 3:2).

5:24 *Faithful **is** the One who calls you, who also will do **it**.*

"Faithful is the One who calls you, who also will do it." Here is the promise behind the prayer. We might look at the call to holiness in this chapter and think we could never do all of that. Paul says, look at God. He is faithful. He called you, and He will finish what He started (Philippians 1:6).

Our hope does not rest on how strong we are. It rests on how faithful He is. The God who called you to Himself will keep you to the end and bring you safely to the day of Christ. What a comfort for young believers under pressure, and for us.

5:25 *Brothers, pray for us.*

"Brothers, pray for us." The great apostle asks for prayer. Paul never thought he was above needing the prayers of other believers, even brand new ones. He knew the work of the gospel depends on prayer (Ephesians 6:18-20; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2).

Notice that Paul has prayed for them all through the letter (1:2; 3:10-13; 5:23). Now he asks them to pray for him. Prayer goes both ways in the body of Christ. Who is praying for you? Whom are you praying for? Your pastor, missionaries you know, and other believers need your prayers.

5:26 *Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.*

"Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss." In that culture, a kiss on the cheek was a normal greeting among family and close friends, much like a handshake or a hug today. Paul uses the same words in other letters (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20).

The word holy matters. This was not romantic or careless. It was a pure sign of family love among believers. Paul says greet "all the brothers," not just your friends. Rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, all were family. The custom may look different in our culture, but the heart of it does not change. Welcome every believer warmly, as family.

5:27 *I charge you by the Lord **that** the letter be read to all the holy brothers.*

"I charge you by the Lord that the letter be read to all the holy brothers." This is strong language. To charge someone by the Lord means to place them under oath before God. Paul wanted every believer in Thessalonica to hear this letter, not just the leaders.

Most people in that day could not read, and copies were few. Letters like this were read aloud when the church gathered. That is still a good practice. Paul's charge also shows that he knew this letter carried the Lord's authority. It was to be read in the church like the Scriptures. Do you make time to hear God's Word, and to read it for yourself?

5:28 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ **be** with you. Amen.*

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen." Paul began the letter with grace (1:1), and he ends it with grace. Everything in between, every command, every warning, every hope, rests on the grace of the Lord Jesus.

That is how the Christian life works. We are saved by grace, we grow by grace, and we will be kept by grace until He comes. Amen means so be it, let it be true. May His grace be with you.

Summary

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When the world says peace and security, sudden destruction will come on them, and they will not escape. But believers are not in darkness. They are sons of light and of day, so they must stay awake and sober, wearing faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet, because God did not appoint us for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that, alive or asleep, we will live together with Him. Paul then gives short commands for church life: honor those who lead, live at peace, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all, never repay evil for evil, rejoice always, pray unceasingly, give thanks in everything, do not quench the Spirit or despise prophecies, test all things, hold fast the good, and abstain from every form of evil. He prays that the God of peace would sanctify them completely and keep them blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus, for the One who calls them is faithful and will do it.

Study Questions

1. How will the day of the Lord come, and what will the world be saying just before it comes? (5:2-3)

2. How do the pronouns change between 5:3 and 5:4, and why does it matter?

3. What armor does Paul tell believers to put on? (5:8)

4. What has God appointed believers for, and what has He not appointed us for? (5:9)

5. How should believers treat those who lead them in the Lord? (5:12-13)

6. What four kinds of people does Paul name in 5:14, and how should each be helped?

7. What three commands does Paul call "the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you"? (5:16-18)

8. How can you test what you hear, and hold fast to what is good? (5:21-22)

9. Which of the commands in 5:12-22 is hardest for you right now, and why?

10. How does knowing that "Faithful is the One who calls you" help you when you feel you are failing? (5:24)

Overview of 2 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians is the fourteenth book of the New Testament. It sits between 1 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy. It is Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica, and it was written only a few months after the first one. It is short, just three chapters, but it holds some of the most important teaching in the New Testament about the day of the Lord and the man of sin, the one many Bible teachers call the Antichrist.

The church was still being persecuted, and the trouble seems to have grown worse. On top of that, someone had shaken them with a false message that the day of the Lord had already come (2:2). If that were true, it would have seemed to mean that they had missed the Lord's coming for His people and were now living in the time of God's wrath. No wonder they were troubled. Some in the church had also stopped working and were living off others. Paul writes to comfort them in their suffering, to correct the false teaching about the day of the Lord, and to command the idle to get back to work. Through it all, his message to them is the same:

2 Thessalonians 2:15 (SLB)

"So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast the traditions which you were taught, whether through word or through our letter."

In chapter 1 Paul promises that God will repay those who afflict His people when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire. In chapter 2 he shows that the day of the Lord cannot have come yet, because the apostasy must come first and "the man of sin" must be revealed (2:3), and he is held back until the one restraining is taken out of the way. In chapter 3 he asks for their prayers, warns them to keep away from believers who refuse to work, and tells them not to grow weary in doing good.

2 Thessalonians has 3 chapters and 47 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Comfort for a Suffering Church (chapter 1)

- Chapter 1: Comfort in Persecution

Part Two: Correction About the Day of the Lord (chapter 2)

- Chapter 2: The Day of the Lord and the Man of Sin

Part Three: Commands for Daily Life (chapter 3)

- Chapter 3: Pray for Us and Do Not Grow Weary

Background of 2 Thessalonians

Author: Like the first letter, this one opens with "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy" (1:1). Paul closes it with his own greeting in his own hand, "which is a sign in every letter" (3:17). The early church accepted it as Paul's letter. Some modern scholars believe a later follower of Paul wrote it in his name. They point to how closely it follows the wording of 1 Thessalonians in some places, to a tone they find cooler, and to the teaching in chapter 2 that certain events must happen before the day of the Lord, which they think does not fit with 1 Thessalonians 5:2. But a letter written to the same church, by the same men, a few months later, would naturally sound like the first one. And the two letters do not disagree. The first letter says the day of the Lord will come suddenly on the unbelieving world. The second says it has not come yet and tells what will mark it. Paul even warns the church about letters falsely claiming to come from him (2:2) and signs this one himself to prove it is real (3:17). I take the letter at its word, as the church always has.

Who it was written to: Paul writes again "to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). These were the same young believers, mostly Gentiles who had turned from idols, who were still suffering for their faith (1:4). For the background of the city and of how the church began, see the Background of 1 Thessalonians.

When and where it was written: Silvanus and Timothy are still with Paul (1:1). Acts tells us the three were together in Corinth (Acts 18:5), and after that Acts does not show Silas with Paul again. So most scholars believe Paul wrote this letter from Corinth a few months after the first, about A.D. 51 or 52. A few scholars have suggested that 2 Thessalonians was actually written first, but the second letter seems to point back to the first one when it speaks of "our letter" (2:15), and most hold to the order we have in our Bibles.

Why Paul wrote: Paul wrote because of three needs. First, the persecution had not stopped, and the believers needed to know that God sees their suffering and will make things right when the Lord Jesus is revealed (1:4-10). Second, someone had told them, by a spirit, a word, or a letter claiming to be from Paul, that the day of the Lord had already come (2:2). Paul reminds them of what he had taught them in person: that day cannot come until the apostasy comes and the man of sin is revealed (2:3-5). Third, the problem of idle believers that Paul mentioned in the first letter (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 5:14) had grown worse. Paul gives clear commands for how the church should deal with them (3:6-15).

The letter and the end times: 2 Thessalonians 2 is one of the hardest passages in Paul's letters, and Bible teachers have read it in many ways. In this study I read it plainly, in the light of the rest of Scripture, especially Daniel 7, 9, and 11, Jesus' words in Matthew 24, and the book of Revelation. I believe the church will be caught up to meet the Lord before the seven-year Tribulation begins (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), that the man of sin will be revealed after the restrainer is taken out of the way, and that Christ will destroy him when He returns visibly to the earth at the end of the Tribulation (2:8; Revelation 19:11-21). Where other good teachers see these things differently, I give their views fairly.

2 Thessalonians 1: Comfort in Persecution

Scripture

1:1-12 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of ***the*** Thessalonians in God our Father and ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ. We ought to give thanks to God always concerning you, brothers, just as it is fitting, because your faith is increasing exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another is abounding, so that we ourselves boast in you in the churches of God for your endurance and faith in all your persecutions and the afflictions which you are bearing, ***which is*** evidence of the righteous judgment of God, for you to be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer, since ***it is*** righteous with God to repay affliction to those afflicting you, and to you who are being afflicted, rest with us at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with ***the*** angels of His power, in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those not knowing God and on those not obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will pay ***the*** penalty, eternal destruction away from ***the*** face of the Lord and from the glory of His strength, when He comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at among all those who believe, because our testimony to you was believed, in that day. For which we also pray always concerning you, that our God may count you worthy of the calling and may fulfill every good pleasure of goodness and work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ.

Preview

Paul opens his second letter with thanks, just as he did his first. The Thessalonians' faith is growing beyond measure, and their love for one another keeps overflowing. Paul boasts about them to other churches because they keep enduring and trusting God through persecution and affliction. Their suffering is not a sign that God has forgotten them. It is proof that God's judgment is right, and that He counts them worthy of His kingdom.

Then Paul tells them how God will set things right. It is just for God to pay back affliction to those who afflict His people, and to give rest to those who are afflicted. That will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel. They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord. On that day He will be glorified in His saints and marveled at by all who believe. Paul closes the chapter with a prayer that God would count them worthy of His calling, so that the name of the Lord Jesus would be glorified in them, and they in Him.

Study

1:1 *Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of* ***the*** *Thessalonians in God our Father and* ***the*** *Lord Jesus Christ:*

"Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The greeting is almost word for word the same as the first letter

(1 Thessalonians 1:1). The same three men are writing to the same church. Silvanus is Silas, Paul's partner on this journey, and Timothy is the young helper who had just been back to visit the church (1 Thessalonians 3:6).

There is one small change. In the first letter Paul said "God the Father" (1 Thessalonians 1:1). Here he says "God our Father." It is a warm touch. The God who rules over all is our Father. For a church under persecution, that was a good place to start. Whatever their neighbors did to them, they belonged to the family of God.

And once again Paul puts "our Father" and "the Lord Jesus Christ" side by side as the One in whom the church lives. Jesus stands with the Father, not below Him.

1:2 *grace to you and peace from God our Father and **the** Lord Jesus Christ.*

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This greeting appears, in one form or another, in every one of Paul's letters. But it is never a throwaway line. Grace is God's undeserved favor, and peace is the wholeness and rest that come when we are right with God.

Paul names where the grace and peace come from: "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." He used the same words at the start of the first letter (1 Thessalonians 1:1), and he says them again here. The source of grace and peace is the Father and the Son together.

Persecuted believers need both. They need grace to stand, and they need peace in their hearts when everything around them is in an uproar. Do you need grace and peace today? They come from the same place they came from for the Thessalonians.

1:3 *We ought to give thanks to God always concerning you, brothers, just as it is fitting, because your faith is increasing exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another is abounding,*

"We ought to give thanks to God always concerning you, brothers, just as it is fitting." The word ought means we owe it, it is our duty. Some might think a duty to give thanks sounds cold. But Paul means that giving thanks for these believers is simply the right thing to do. God was at work in them, and it would be wrong not to thank Him.

Why give thanks? "Because your faith is increasing exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another is abounding." In the first letter Paul prayed that their love would increase and abound (1 Thessalonians 3:12), and he wrote that he wanted to complete what was lacking in their faith (1 Thessalonians 3:10). God answered both prayers. Their faith was growing beyond measure, like a plant shooting up. Their love was overflowing, and it was not just a few of them. It was "each one of you all."

Notice that hope is missing from Paul's list here, though he named faith, love, and hope together in the first letter (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Some teachers think that is because their hope had been shaken by the false teaching about the day of the Lord. Paul will deal with that in chapter 2.

1:4 *so that we ourselves boast in you in the churches of God for your endurance and faith in all your persecutions and the afflictions which you are bearing,*

"So that we ourselves boast in you in the churches of God." Paul usually did not boast about himself. But he was glad to boast about what God was doing in His people. He told other churches about the Thessalonians, probably including the new church in Corinth where he was writing.

What did he boast about? Their "endurance and faith in all your persecutions and the afflictions which you are bearing." Persecutions are attacks from outside because of their faith. Afflictions are the pressures and troubles that come with it. Notice the word bearing. It means they were still under it. The trouble had not stopped. But they were holding up under it, and they kept trusting God.

That is a model for us. Endurance does not mean we never feel the weight. It means we keep going under it, trusting God the whole way. If you are carrying something heavy right now, God sees it, and your faithfulness in it brings Him glory.

1:5 ***which is*** *evidence of the righteous judgment of God, for you to be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer,*

"Which is evidence of the righteous judgment of God." What is evidence? Their endurance and faith under persecution. The way they held up showed that God was at work in them, and it pointed ahead to the day when God will judge rightly.

Paul goes on, "for you to be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer." This does not mean they earned the kingdom by suffering. We are saved by grace through faith, not by anything we do or endure (Ephesians 2:8-9). To be counted worthy means to be shown to be fit for it, declared to belong to it. Their suffering for Christ showed that they truly belonged to His kingdom. The world rejected them because they belonged to Christ, and God would never reject them.

The kingdom of God here points to the coming kingdom, when Christ will reign on the earth (Revelation 20:4-6). Jesus said it plainly: "Blessed are those who have been persecuted on account of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (Matthew 5:10).

1:6 *since* ***it is*** *righteous with God to repay affliction to those afflicting you,*

"Since it is righteous with God to repay affliction to those afflicting you." God is just. He does not overlook what is done to His people. Those who afflict believers will one day be paid back with affliction.

This is not revenge in the sense of a bitter, out-of-control anger. It is justice. A judge who let evil go unpunished would not be a good judge. God says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Romans 12:19, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35). That is exactly why believers do not have to take revenge themselves (1 Thessalonians 5:15). We can leave it in His hands.

This was a great comfort to the Thessalonians. Their neighbors seemed to be getting away with it. Paul tells them they would not. And it is a comfort to persecuted believers around the world today. God sees, and God will judge.

1:7 *and to you who are being afflicted, rest with us at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with* ***the*** *angels of His power,*

"And to you who are being afflicted, rest with us." The word rest means relief, a loosening, like the release of a bowstring that has been pulled tight. Paul says "with us." He and his companions were suffering too, and they would share that rest together.

When does that rest come? "At the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power." The word revelation is apokalupsis, an unveiling, the same word that gives the book of Revelation its name. Right now Jesus is hidden from the world's eyes. One day He will be unveiled for all to see. He will come "from heaven," where He now reigns. And He will come "with the angels of His power," His mighty angels (Matthew 25:31).

Some teachers say this verse shows that the church will be on the earth until this moment, so the rapture must happen at the end of the Tribulation. In the pre-tribulation reading, Paul is speaking here of when God openly repays the persecutors and the scales are set right before the whole world. Believers who have died are already at rest with the Lord, and believers caught away at the rapture will already be with Him. At the revelation of Jesus, that rest will be shown publicly, as He comes with His saints (1 Thessalonians 3:13) and the persecutors receive their justice. Paul's focus here is not on the timing of the rapture, but on the certainty that God will set things right.

1:8 *in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those not knowing God and on those not obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

"In flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those not knowing God and on those not obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Fire in Scripture often shows God's holy presence and His judgment, as at the burning bush (Exodus 3:2) and at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18). When Jesus returns, He will come in blazing glory as the Judge (Revelation 19:11-12).

Who will face His judgment? Paul names two descriptions. "Those not knowing God." These are people who have turned away from the knowledge of God that He has given to all people through creation and conscience (Romans 1:18-21). And "those not obeying the gospel." The gospel is not just information. It is a call from God to repent and believe in Jesus. To refuse it is to disobey God.

These two may describe the same people in two ways. Either way, the dividing line is the gospel. What people do with Jesus decides where they will stand on that day. Have you obeyed the gospel by turning to Christ in faith?

Old Testament links: Isaiah 66:15 (alluded to)

1:9 *who will pay **the** penalty, eternal destruction away from **the** face of the Lord and from the glory of His strength,*

"Who will pay the penalty, eternal destruction away from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His strength." These are some of the most solemn words in the Bible.

Notice the word eternal. The penalty does not end. Jesus spoke of "eternal punishment" in the same breath as "eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). The destruction Paul means is ruin, the loss of everything good. It does not mean being wiped out of existence. Most Bible teachers through history have read it that way, though some teach that the lost will one day cease to exist.

And what is the worst part? It is "away from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His strength." Hell is being shut out from the presence of God, the source of every good thing. Every kindness, every joy, every good gift on this earth comes from God (James 1:17). To be cut off from Him forever is to lose them all.

I do not write this to frighten anyone for the sake of it. I write it because it is true, and because God does not want anyone to face it (2 Peter 3:9). That is why He sent His Son. If you are reading this and have never turned to Jesus, please do not put it off.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 2:10 (alluded to); Isaiah 2:19 (alluded to)

1:10 *when He comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at among all those who believe, because our testimony to you was believed, in that day.*

"When He comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at among all those who believe." This is the other side of that day. For the lost, it is a day of judgment. For believers, it is a day of glory.

Jesus will be "glorified in His saints." That means His glory will be shown in His people. When the world sees what He has done in those He saved, they will see how great He is. His saints come with Him (1 Thessalonians 3:13; Jude 14), changed and glorified, and He receives honor through what He has made them.

"To be marveled at among all those who believe." Believers will be amazed at Him. We will look at Him and wonder. We will finally see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

"Because our testimony to you was believed, in that day." Paul wants the Thessalonians to know they will be part of this. Why? Because they believed the message Paul brought them. Faith in the gospel now means glory with Christ then. "In that day" points to the day of His revelation from heaven in verse 7.

1:11 *For which we also pray always concerning you, that our God may count you worthy of the calling and may fulfill every good pleasure of goodness and work of faith with power,*

"For which we also pray always concerning you." Because that day is coming, Paul prays for them. Here is what he prays.

"That our God may count you worthy of the calling." God has called them to Himself, to His kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12). Paul prays that their lives would match that calling, and that God would show them to be fit for it. Again, this is not earning salvation. It is about living in a way that fits what God has already done.

"And may fulfill every good pleasure of goodness and work of faith with power." Paul prays that God would bring to completion every good desire they have to do good, and every work that comes from their faith. And he prays it would happen "with power," God's power, not their own. We want to do good, and we try, but we often fall short. Paul asks God to finish what we cannot finish on our own. That is a good prayer to pray for yourself and for others.

1:12 *so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and* ***the*** *Lord Jesus Christ.*

"So that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him." Here is the goal of Paul's prayer. The name of a person in the Bible stands for who he is. Paul wants the Lord Jesus to be honored by the way the Thessalonians live. Their lives are to show others what Jesus is like.

And then the amazing part: "and you in Him." As they bring glory to Jesus, they themselves share in His glory. That is the wonder of being united to Christ. What happens to Him happens to us. Whatever we give to Him, He gives back far more.

"According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." Once again everything rests on grace. We do not glorify Him by our own strength, and we do not share His glory because we deserve it. It is all grace from beginning to end.

Many Bible teachers point out that the Greek words here can also be read as naming one Person, our God and Lord, Jesus Christ, as in Titus 2:13. Either way, Paul once again puts Jesus right beside the Father as the source of grace.

Summary

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy greet the church and give thanks because the Thessalonians' faith is growing exceedingly and their love for one another is overflowing. Paul boasts in the churches about their endurance and faith in all their persecutions. Their endurance is evidence of God's righteous judgment and shows them worthy of the kingdom of God, for which they suffer. It is right for God to repay affliction to those who afflict His people and to give rest to the afflicted when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire. He will bring vengeance on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel. They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the face of the Lord and the glory of His strength. On that day He will be glorified in His saints and marveled at by all who believe. Paul prays that God would count them worthy of their calling and fulfill every good purpose and work of faith with power, so that the name of the Lord Jesus would be glorified in them, and they in Him, by the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Study Questions

1. For what two things did Paul give thanks in the Thessalonians? (1:3)

2. What did Paul boast about to the other churches? (1:4)

3. What does it mean to be "counted worthy of the kingdom of God," and how is that different from earning it? (1:5)

4. Why is it right for God to repay those who afflict His people? (1:6)

5. When will the afflicted receive rest, and how will the Lord Jesus be revealed? (1:7-8)

6. What penalty will those who do not obey the gospel pay, and what makes it so terrible? (1:9)

7. How will the Lord Jesus be glorified in His saints on that day? (1:10)

8. Knowing that God will judge rightly, how should you respond to people who treat you unfairly because of your faith? (1:6-7)

9. Is there someone you know who has not obeyed the gospel? How could you pray for them and share Christ with them? (1:8-9)

10. What would it look like for the name of the Lord Jesus to be glorified in your life this week? (1:11-12)

2 Thessalonians 2: The Day of the Lord and the Man of Sin

Scripture

2:1-17 Now we ask you, brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from the mind nor be troubled, neither through a spirit nor through a word nor through a letter as if through us, as that the day of Christ has come. Let no one deceive you in any way; because ***it will not come*** unless the apostasy comes first and the man of sin is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he sits down in the temple of God as God, displaying himself that he is God. Do you not remember that while still being with you I was telling you these things? And now you know that which is restraining, for him to be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already working; only the one restraining now ***will restrain*** until he is out of the midst. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and will abolish by the appearing of His coming, ***the one*** whose coming is according to the working of Satan in every power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in every deceit of unrighteousness in those who are perishing, because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved. And because of this God will send them a working of delusion, so that they believe the falsehood, in order that all may be judged who did not believe the truth but delighted in unrighteousness. But we ought to give thanks to God always concerning you, brothers beloved by ***the*** Lord, because God chose you from ***the*** beginning for salvation in sanctification of ***the*** Spirit and faith in ***the*** truth, to which He called you through our gospel, for ***the*** obtaining of ***the*** glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast the traditions which you were taught, whether through word or through our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God and our Father, who loved us and gave ***us*** eternal comfort and good hope in grace, comfort your hearts and strengthen you in every good word and work.

Preview

Someone had shaken the Thessalonians badly. Whether by a claimed word from the Spirit, a report, or a letter that pretended to come from Paul, they had been told that the day of Christ had already come. Paul writes to settle them. He reminds them of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, and he tells them not to be deceived. That day will not come until the apostasy comes first and the man of sin is revealed, the son of destruction, who sets himself up above every god and sits in the temple of God, claiming to be God.

Paul had told them all this in person. They knew that something, and Someone, was holding the man of sin back until his time. The mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who restrains will keep restraining until he is taken out of the way. Then the lawless one will be revealed, with Satan's power and false signs and wonders, and those who refused to love the truth will be deceived. But the Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of His mouth and bring him to nothing by the appearing of His coming. Paul then turns with relief to the believers. God chose them for salvation and called them through the gospel to share the glory of Christ. So they are to

stand firm and hold on to what they were taught. The chapter ends with a prayer for comfort and strength from the Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father.

Study

2:1 *Now we ask you, brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,*

"Now we ask you, brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him." Paul is about to correct a false teaching, and he begins by pointing them back to their hope.

Notice the two things Paul names together. First, "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The word coming is parousia, the same word Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 for the Lord's coming for His church. Second, "our gathering together to Him." The word for gathering together is used in only one other place in the New Testament, in Hebrews 10:25 for believers assembling together. Here it means believers being gathered to the Lord Jesus. In the pre-tribulation reading this study follows, this is the same event Paul described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, when the dead in Christ rise and living believers are caught away together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

Why would Paul start here? Because the false teaching had shaken their confidence in this very hope. In effect, Paul is saying he wants to talk with them about the Lord's coming for His people, because that is where their fear came from.

Some teachers read "the coming" and "our gathering" here as the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation, with the church gathered to Christ at that time. But Paul connects this gathering to the same comfort he gave in the first letter, and in the pre-tribulation reading he is pointing to the rapture.

2:2 *that you not be quickly shaken from the mind nor be troubled, neither through a spirit nor through a word nor through a letter as if through us, as that the day of Christ has come.*

"That you not be quickly shaken from the mind nor be troubled." The word shaken was used for a ship pulled loose from its anchor and tossed by the waves. The word troubled means alarmed, frightened. Jesus used it when He told His disciples, "see, do not be alarmed," when they hear of wars (Matthew 24:6).

Where did this alarm come from? Paul names three possible sources: "neither through a spirit nor through a word nor through a letter as if through us." A spirit probably means someone claiming to speak a prophecy by the Spirit. A word could mean a teaching or a report passed along. A letter as if from Paul means someone may have forged a letter in Paul's name, or twisted something he wrote. Paul does not know which it was, so he covers all three. No matter how a message comes, if it does not match what the apostles taught, reject it (Galatians 1:8).

What was the false teaching? "As that the day of Christ has come." The SLB follows the Received Greek Text here, which reads "the day of Christ." Most older Greek copies read the day of the Lord,

and many modern Bibles print it that way. In this context both point to the same thing: the day of the Lord that Paul taught about in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, the time of God's judgment on the earth.

The words "has come" mean it is already here, already present. Someone was telling them they were already living in the day of the Lord. Their persecution was so severe that they may have thought this was the beginning of God's wrath.

Think about why that would have frightened them so much. Paul had taught them that God did not appoint them for wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9) and that the Lord would come for them first (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). If the day of the Lord had already come, it would seem that they had been left behind, or that Paul's teaching was wrong. If they had been taught that the church would go through the Tribulation, a report that it had begun might have made them brace themselves, but it would not have upset their whole hope the way this did. Their alarm fits best with what Paul had taught them: the Lord comes for His church before the day of wrath.

2:3 *Let no one deceive you in any way; because **it will not come** unless the apostasy comes first and the man of sin is revealed, the son of destruction,*

"Let no one deceive you in any way." Paul is firm. Do not be fooled, no matter who says it or how they say it.

Then he gives the reason the day of the Lord cannot have come: "because it will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of sin is revealed, the son of destruction." Two things must happen first. The words "it will not come" are supplied in English, but they are clearly what Paul means. Greek writers often left out words the reader could easily fill in.

First, "the apostasy." The Greek word is apostasia. It means a departure, a standing away from something. In the New Testament it is used one other time, in Acts 21:21, where Paul was accused of teaching the Jews "apostasy from Moses," turning away from the Law. So most Bible teachers understand the apostasy here as a great turning away from the faith, a rebellion against God and His truth that comes to its peak in the last days. Paul warned Timothy that "in later times some will depart from the faith" (1 Timothy 4:1), and that "they will not endure sound teaching" (2 Timothy 4:3). Jesus said that "because lawlessness is multiplied, the love of the many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12).

Notice that Paul says "the apostasy," with the word the. It is not just any falling away. It is a particular one the Thessalonians had heard about.

Some pre-tribulation teachers take the word in its basic sense of departure and believe Paul is speaking of the departure of the church at the rapture. A few English Bibles from the 1500s used the word departing here. On that view, Paul is saying the day of the Lord cannot come until the church has been taken out. That is an interesting reading, but most teachers, including most who hold a pre-tribulation rapture, understand it as a departure from the faith. Either way, the point for the Thessalonians was the same: the day of the Lord had not come.

Second, "the man of sin is revealed." This is a real man, a person, not just an idea or a system. The SLB reads "man of sin," following the Received Greek Text. Many older Greek copies read man of

lawlessness, and Paul calls him "the lawless one" in verse 8. Sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4), so the two readings mean the same thing. He is the man who is marked by sin and lawlessness above all others.

Who is he? Many Bible teachers see him as the same person Scripture describes in other places: the little horn of Daniel 7:8, the coming ruler who makes a covenant for one seven and breaks it in the middle (Daniel 9:26-27), the king who exalts himself above every god (Daniel 11:36), and the beast of Revelation 13. John says "the antichrist is coming" (1 John 2:18). Antichrist means one who stands against Christ, and also one who stands in place of Christ, a false christ.

He is "the son of destruction." Jesus called Judas "the son of destruction" (John 17:12). It means one who belongs to destruction and is headed for it. His end is already settled. John says the beast will "go into destruction" (Revelation 17:8), and he will be thrown alive into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20).

2:4 *who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he sits down in the temple of God as God, displaying himself that he is God.*

"Who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship." This man will set himself against everything that is worshiped. He will put down every religion and every god, true or false, and lift himself up above all of them. Daniel saw this: "he will exalt himself and magnify himself above every god; and against the God of gods he will speak extraordinary things" (Daniel 11:36).

"So that he sits down in the temple of God as God, displaying himself that he is God." Here is the height of his pride. He will take his seat in the temple of God and claim to be God himself.

What temple is this? The word Paul uses means the sanctuary, the inner holy place. Read plainly, alongside Daniel and the words of Jesus, this points to a future temple in Jerusalem. Daniel spoke of the one who would stop the sacrifices and set up an abomination in the middle of the seven years (Daniel 9:27). Jesus spoke of "the abomination of desolation" standing "in the holy place" (Matthew 24:15). And John saw the false prophet making the whole world worship the beast and his image (Revelation 13:12-15). When the man of sin sits in the temple and demands worship, that is the abomination that brings desolation, at the middle of the Tribulation.

Some Bible teachers read the temple here as the church, with the man of sin rising within it, or as a picture of his claim to divine power. Others believe Paul was speaking of events in the first century, such as the Roman emperor Caligula's attempt to have his statue set up in the temple in Jerusalem, or the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. But no one in the first century fulfilled all that Paul describes, and the Lord did not destroy that person "by the appearing of His coming" (2:8). That is why this study reads it as still future.

Satan has always wanted to be worshiped as God (Isaiah 14:13-14; Matthew 4:8-9). In the man of sin, he will come closer to it than ever before. But his time will be short.

Old Testament links: Daniel 11:36 (alluded to); Ezekiel 28:2 (alluded to); Isaiah 14:13-14 (alluded to)

2:5 *Do you not remember that while still being with you I was telling you these things?*

"Do you not remember that while still being with you I was telling you these things?" There is a gentle rebuke here. Paul had told them all of this when he was with them. The tense means he told them more than once.

Think about what that means. Paul was in Thessalonica only a short time, and the church was made up of brand new believers. Yet he did not think prophecy was too hard or too unimportant to teach them. He taught them about the man of sin, the day of the Lord, and the Lord's coming in their first few weeks of faith.

Some people today say that Bible prophecy is too confusing, or that it only divides people, so we should leave it alone. Paul did not think so. God put it in His Word for our comfort and our protection. If the Thessalonians had remembered what Paul taught, they would not have been shaken. Knowing what the Bible teaches about the future protects us from being fooled.

2:6 *And now you know that which is restraining, for him to be revealed in his own time.*

"And now you know that which is restraining." To restrain means to hold back, to hold down, to keep something in check. Something is holding back the man of sin from being revealed. The Thessalonians knew what it was, because Paul had told them. We have to piece it together from the rest of Scripture.

Notice that in this verse the word is neuter: "that which is restraining." In the next verse it is masculine: "the one restraining." So the restrainer is spoken of both as a thing and as a person. I believe this fits the Holy Spirit best. In Greek, the word for Spirit, pneuma, is neuter, but the Spirit is a Person. In John 14 to 16, Jesus refers to the Spirit with both kinds of words, as when He calls Him "the Spirit of truth" and then says "He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13).

"For him to be revealed in his own time." The man of sin will not show up one day early. God has set his time. Even the coming of the greatest enemy of God is under God's control. Nothing about the end catches God by surprise.

2:7 *For the mystery of lawlessness is already working; only the one restraining now* ***will restrain*** *until he is out of the midst.*

"For the mystery of lawlessness is already working." A mystery in the Bible is something hidden that God reveals. Lawlessness is already at work in the world, hidden, behind the scenes. John said the same: the spirit "of the antichrist" is "already in the world" (1 John 4:3). Satan is "the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). Rebellion against God is growing, and it is moving toward the day when it will be openly revealed in one man.

"Only the one restraining now will restrain until he is out of the midst." Lawlessness is at work, but it is being held back. Someone is restraining it. And He will keep doing so until He is taken out of the way.

Who is the restrainer? I believe the best answer is the Holy Spirit, working through the church. Only God is strong enough to hold back Satan and his man. Jesus said the Spirit would "convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment" (John 16:8). The Spirit lives in every believer, and Jesus calls His people "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-14). Through the church, the Holy Spirit holds back the full flood of evil.

"Until he is out of the midst." When the church is caught away at the rapture, the Spirit's restraining work through the church will be taken out of the way. That does not mean the Holy Spirit will leave the world completely. He is God, and He is everywhere. People will still be saved during the Tribulation by His work, a great multitude "out of every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues" (Revelation 7:9). But His work of restraining evil through the church, which lives in this world as His temple, will be removed. Then the man of sin will be revealed.

This fits everything Paul has said. The church is gathered to the Lord (2:1), the restrainer is taken out of the way (2:7), the man of sin is revealed (2:8), and the day of the Lord comes. So the Thessalonians could know the day of the Lord had not come. The church was still here, and the man of sin had not been revealed.

Good Bible teachers have offered other answers. Many in the early church believed the restrainer was the Roman Empire and its law, holding back chaos. Some believe it is human government in general, which God set up to restrain evil (Romans 13:1-4). Others suggest the preaching of the gospel, or Paul himself, or the archangel Michael, who stands guard over Israel (Daniel 12:1). Each of these has something to it, but none of them seems strong enough, or lasting enough, to hold back Satan until God's time. The Roman Empire fell long ago, and the man of sin has not come. I believe the Holy Spirit working through the church is the answer that best fits the whole of Scripture.

2:8 *And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and will abolish by the appearing of His coming,*

"And then the lawless one will be revealed." Once the restrainer is removed, the man of sin steps onto the stage. Paul now calls him "the lawless one," the man who sets himself against every law of God.

But before Paul even describes his career, he tells us how it ends: "whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth." Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah that "with the breath of His lips He will put the wicked to death" (Isaiah 11:4). John saw the same thing. When Jesus returns on the white horse, a sharp sword comes out of His mouth (Revelation 19:15), and the beast is captured and thrown alive into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20). The lawless one, with all his power and armies, will be undone by a word from Jesus.

"And will abolish by the appearing of His coming." To abolish means to make powerless, to bring to nothing. The words "the appearing of His coming" join two words: epiphaneia, which means a shining forth or bright appearing, and parousia, the coming. When Jesus returns visibly to the earth at the end of the Tribulation, the mere shining of His presence will be enough to end the reign of the man of sin.

Notice that Paul uses parousia for the Lord's coming for His church in 2:1 and for His coming to destroy the man of sin here. The word means arrival or presence, and it can cover both stages of the Lord's coming. The context shows which is in view. In 2:1, it is the gathering of His people to Him. Here, it is His shining appearance to judge.

For believers who feel that evil is winning in the world, this verse is a great comfort. The most powerful evil man in history will fall with one breath from the Lord Jesus.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 11:4 (alluded to)

2:9 ***the one*** *whose coming is according to the working of Satan in every power and signs and wonders of falsehood,*

Now Paul goes back to describe the lawless one before his end. "The one whose coming is according to the working of Satan." Notice that Paul uses the word parousia for the lawless one's coming too. He is a counterfeit christ with a counterfeit coming. Jesus comes in the power of God. The lawless one comes "according to the working of Satan." Satan is the power behind him (Revelation 13:2, 4).

He comes "in every power and signs and wonders of falsehood." These are the same three kinds of words Peter used for the miracles of Jesus in Acts 2:22: miracles, wonders, and signs. The lawless one will copy them. Jesus warned that false christs and false prophets "will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24). The false prophet who serves the beast will even make "fire come down out of heaven to the earth before men" (Revelation 13:13).

Are these signs real or fake? Paul calls them signs and wonders "of falsehood." They may be real supernatural works by Satan's power, or they may be clever tricks. Either way, they serve a lie. That is an important lesson for us. A miracle by itself does not prove that something is from God. We must test everything by the truth of God's Word (1 John 4:1).

2:10 *and in every deceit of unrighteousness in those who are perishing, because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved.*

"And in every deceit of unrighteousness in those who are perishing." The lawless one will use every kind of deception that wickedness can come up with. And it will work "in those who are perishing," the people who are on the road to destruction because they have rejected God.

"Because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved." Here is why they are deceived. It is not that they never had a chance. It is that they did not love the truth. The truth was offered to them, and they did not want it. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), and the gospel is the word of truth. To refuse to love the truth is to refuse Christ.

Notice the phrase "the love of the truth." It is not enough to know about the truth. God looks for people who love it. When people do not love the truth, they become open to every lie. "So that they might be saved" shows us God's heart. The truth was offered for their salvation. They turned it away.

2:11 *And because of this God will send them a working of delusion, so that they believe the falsehood,*

"And because of this God will send them a working of delusion, so that they believe the falsehood." This is a hard verse. Does God deceive people? No. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). But when people keep rejecting the truth, God gives them over to what they have chosen. This is His judgment. We see the same thing in Romans 1, where three times Paul says that God "gave them up" to what they wanted (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). Pharaoh hardened his own heart again and again, and then God hardened it (Exodus 8:15, 32; 9:12).

"So that they believe the falsehood." The words "the falsehood" point to one great lie, most likely the lie that the man of sin is God (2:4). It is the same old lie the serpent told in the garden, that people can be like God (Genesis 3:5).

Some teachers believe this verse means that people who clearly heard and rejected the gospel before the rapture will not be able to believe once the Tribulation begins. Others believe Paul is speaking more generally of all who reject the truth and delight in sin. Scripture is clear that many will come to Christ during the Tribulation (Revelation 7:9-14). What is clear in this verse is that no one should put off coming to Christ. Rejecting the truth hardens the heart. Today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

2:12 *in order that all may be judged who did not believe the truth but delighted in unrighteousness.*

"In order that all may be judged who did not believe the truth but delighted in unrighteousness." Here is the end of the matter. God's judgment falls on those who did not believe the truth.

Notice the two sides. They "did not believe the truth," and they "delighted in unrighteousness." Unbelief is not just a matter of the mind. It is a matter of what the heart loves. People reject the truth because they love their sin (John 3:19-20). They are not forced into sin. They take pleasure in it.

God's judgment is always just. No one will be condemned who did not choose to reject the truth. And no one who comes to Jesus will ever be turned away (John 6:37). If you have been putting off the gospel because you love something more than Jesus, this verse is a warning. Turn to Him while there is time.

2:13 *But we ought to give thanks to God always concerning you, brothers beloved by* ***the*** *Lord, because God chose you from* ***the*** *beginning for salvation in sanctification of* ***the*** *Spirit and faith in* ***the*** *truth,*

"But we ought to give thanks to God always concerning you, brothers beloved by the Lord." What a change in tone. After the dark picture of those who are perishing, Paul turns to the believers with thanks. They are not like the perishing. They are "beloved by the Lord."

"Because God chose you from the beginning for salvation." The SLB reads "from the beginning," following the Received Greek Text. Some Greek copies read "as firstfruits," the first of a great harvest. Either way, God's choosing lies behind their salvation.

As in 1 Thessalonians 1:4, Bible teachers differ on how God's choosing works. Some believe God chose specific people based only on His own will and grace. Others believe God chose, in Christ, those He knew would believe (1 Peter 1:2). What this verse makes plain is how God brings His chosen ones to salvation: "in sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth." The Holy Spirit sets us apart, and we believe the truth. Both are part of it. Notice the contrast with verses 10-12. The perishing did not believe the truth. These believers did.

2:14 *to which He called you through our gospel, for **the** obtaining of **the** glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

"To which He called you through our gospel." God's choosing in eternity became God's calling in time. How did God call them? "Through our gospel," the message Paul, Silas, and Timothy preached in Thessalonica. God uses the preaching of the gospel to call people to Himself (Romans 10:14-17). That is why we share it.

"For the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here is where the call leads. Not to wrath, but to glory (1 Thessalonians 5:9). The word obtaining is the same word Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, "for obtaining salvation." God called us to share in the glory of Jesus. One day we will be like Him and with Him forever (Romans 8:30; Colossians 3:4).

Think about the difference. The followers of the lawless one will share his destruction. The followers of the Lord Jesus will share His glory.

2:15 *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast the traditions which you were taught, whether through word or through our letter.*

"So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast the traditions which you were taught." Because of all this, Paul gives two commands. Stand firm, do not be shaken (2:2). And hold fast, keep a tight grip on what you were taught.

What are "the traditions"? The word means what is handed down. Here it means the teaching the apostles handed down to the church, "whether through word or through our letter." Paul taught them in person, by word of mouth, and he taught them in writing, through the letter he had already sent (1 Thessalonians). The teaching was the same either way.

Today we have the apostles' teaching in the New Testament. Protestant teachers hold that the Scriptures are now the only sure and final rule for what the apostles handed down. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches also look to church tradition passed down over the centuries alongside Scripture. What is plain in this verse is that the standard is what the apostles taught, and we are to hold on to it. Hold fast to the Word, and you will not be shaken by every new teaching that comes along.

2:16-17 *Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God and our Father, who loved us and gave **us** eternal comfort and good hope in grace, comfort your hearts and strengthen you in every good word and work.*

Paul closes the chapter with a prayer. "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God and our Father." Notice that Paul names the Lord Jesus first here. He usually names the Father first. Here Jesus comes first, and both are named together as the One who acts. In the Greek, the words for loved and gave are singular, just as the verb for direct was singular in 1 Thessalonians 3:11. The Father and the Son act as one.

"Who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope in grace." God has loved us, and because He loves us He has given us two gifts. "Eternal comfort," a comfort that never runs out, not like the comfort of this world, which fades. And "good hope," a hope that will not let us down, the hope of the Lord's coming and our gathering together to Him (2:1). Both come "in grace," as a gift we did not earn.

Then Paul prays that God would "comfort your hearts and strengthen you in every good word and work." The Thessalonians had been shaken and troubled (2:2). Paul prays for comfort in their hearts and strength in their lives. A settled heart leads to steady work and true words. Our hope in the Lord's coming is not meant to make us sit and stare at the sky. It is meant to comfort us and make us strong to do good.

Summary

Paul asks the Thessalonians, concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, not to be shaken or alarmed by any spirit, word, or letter claiming that the day of the Lord has come. That day will not come until the apostasy comes first and the man of sin, the son of destruction, is revealed. He will oppose and exalt himself above every god and sit in the temple of God, displaying himself as God. Paul had taught them these things in person. They knew what was restraining him until his time. The mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who restrains will keep restraining until he is taken out of the way. Then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord will consume him with the breath of His mouth and bring him to nothing by the appearing of His coming. His coming will be by Satan's working, with false signs and wonders and every deceit, among those who are perishing because they did not receive the love of the truth. God will send them a working of delusion so that they believe the lie and are judged. But Paul thanks God for the believers, chosen for salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth, and called through the gospel to share the glory of Christ. They are to stand firm and hold fast what the apostles taught. Paul prays that the Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father, who gave eternal comfort and good hope, would comfort their hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Study Questions

1. What two things does Paul name in 2:1, and how do they connect to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17?

2. What false teaching had shaken the Thessalonians, and how might it have reached them? (2:2)

3. What two things must happen before the day of the Lord comes? (2:3)

4. What will the man of sin do, and where will he sit? (2:4)

5. Who does this study believe the restrainer is, and what other views do teachers hold? (2:6-7)

6. How will the Lord Jesus bring the lawless one to his end? (2:8)

7. Why will those who are perishing be deceived? (2:10-12)

8. Why does Paul give thanks for the believers, and what has God called them to? (2:13-14)

9. Paul taught prophecy to brand new believers. How does knowing what the Bible says about the future protect you from being shaken? (2:2, 5, 15)

10. Do you love the truth, or only know about it? What is one way you could grow in your love for God's Word? (2:10)

2 Thessalonians 3: Pray for Us and Do Not Grow Weary

Scripture

3:1-18 Finally, brothers, pray concerning us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, just as also with you, and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all ***have*** the faith. But the Lord is faithful, who will strengthen you and guard ***you*** from the evil. And we are confident in ***the*** Lord concerning you, that the things which we command you, you both are doing and will do. And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the endurance of Christ. Now we command you, brothers, in ***the*** name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to withdraw from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how it is necessary to imitate us, because we were not disorderly among you, nor did we eat bread from anyone without payment, but in labor and toil, working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you; not that we do not have authority, but that we might give ourselves ***as*** an example to you, so that you imitate us. For even when we were with you, we were commanding you this, that if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat. For we hear ***that*** some are walking among you disorderly, not working at all, but being busybodies. Now to such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ, that working with quietness they may eat their own bread. But you, brothers, do not grow weary doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word through the letter, take note of this ***one***, and do not associate with him, so that he may be ashamed. And do not regard ***him*** as an enemy, but admonish ***him*** as a brother. Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace continually in every way. The Lord ***be*** with you all. The greeting by my own hand, of Paul, which is a sign in every letter; thus I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ***be*** with you all. Amen.

Preview

Paul begins the last chapter by asking for prayer. He wants the word of the Lord to run and be honored everywhere, as it was in Thessalonica, and he asks to be delivered from evil men, because not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful. He will strengthen the Thessalonians and guard them from the evil one. Paul is confident they will keep doing what he commands, and he prays that the Lord would direct their hearts into the love of God and the endurance of Christ.

Then Paul deals with a problem that had grown worse since his first letter. Some in the church were walking disorderly. They were not working at all, but were busybodies, living off the generosity of others. Paul reminds them that when he was with them he worked night and day so as not to be a burden, to give them an example. He had told them plainly that if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat. Now he commands the idle to work quietly and eat their own bread, and he tells the church how to deal with anyone who will not obey: take note of him, do not associate with him, so that he may be ashamed, yet do not treat him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. Paul closes with a prayer for peace, his own handwritten greeting, and a final blessing of grace.

Study

3:1 *Finally, brothers, pray concerning us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, just as also with you,*

"Finally, brothers, pray concerning us." As in the first letter (1 Thessalonians 5:25), Paul asks these young believers to pray for him. He had just finished praying for them (2:16-17). Now he asks them to return the favor.

What did he want them to pray for? Not for his comfort, his health, or his safety first. "That the word of the Lord may run and be glorified." Paul pictures God's Word as a runner in a race, moving quickly from place to place. Psalm 147:15 says "His word runs very quickly." To be glorified means to be honored, to be received as the true word of God and to change lives.

"Just as also with you." That is what had happened in Thessalonica. The word ran there, and it was received with joy (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:13). Paul wanted it to happen in Corinth too, where he was preaching as he wrote. When you pray for missionaries and pastors, pray first for the Word to run.

Old Testament links: Psalm 147:15 (alluded to)

3:2 *and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all **have** the faith.*

"And that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men." The second request is for protection. Perverse means out of place, wrong, twisted. Evil means actively harmful, wicked. Paul faced men like this in Corinth. Acts 18:6 and 18:12-13 tell how the Jews in Corinth opposed him and dragged him before the Roman governor.

"For not all have the faith." This is a sad but simple fact. Not everyone believes. The gospel is offered to everyone, but not everyone receives it. Some reject it and fight it. That is why Paul needed prayer. The opposition was real.

Notice that Paul asks for prayer for deliverance, but he does not stop preaching while he waits for it. He kept working and trusted God to protect him. While Paul was in Corinth, the Lord told him in a vision not to be afraid and to keep speaking, because He was with him (Acts 18:9-10).

3:3 *But the Lord is faithful, who will strengthen you and guard **you** from the evil.*

"But the Lord is faithful." Paul has just said that not all have faith. Now he says the Lord is faithful. People may let us down, but the Lord never will. The two words go together in Greek. Not all have faith, but the Lord is full of faithfulness.

"Who will strengthen you and guard you from the evil." To strengthen means to set firmly, the same word Paul used in 2:17 and in 1 Thessalonians 3:2, 13. To guard means to protect, like a soldier standing watch.

The words "from the evil" can also be read as from the evil one, Satan himself. The Greek can mean either. Jesus taught us to pray "deliver us from the evil" (Matthew 6:13), and He prayed for

His disciples, "keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). Either way, the promise is that the Lord will protect His people. Satan hindered Paul (1 Thessalonians 2:18), and he tempts believers (1 Thessalonians 3:5), but he cannot snatch them out of the Lord's hand (John 10:28-29).

3:4 *And we are confident in **the** Lord concerning you, that the things which we command you, you both are doing and will do.*

"And we are confident in the Lord concerning you." Paul's confidence was not in the Thessalonians' strength. It was "in the Lord." He trusted God to keep working in them.

"That the things which we command you, you both are doing and will do." Paul believes they are already obeying and will keep obeying. This also prepares them for what comes next. Paul is about to give some hard commands about idle members, and he expresses confidence that the church as a whole will obey.

This is a good way to encourage people. Paul does not start with scolding. He starts with trust. When we have to correct someone, it helps to let them know first that we believe in what God is doing in them.

3:5 *And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the endurance of Christ.*

"And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the endurance of Christ." Paul prays again. To direct means to make a straight path, to clear the road. Paul used the same word when he prayed that God would direct his way back to them (1 Thessalonians 3:11).

Where does Paul want their hearts to go? Two places. First, "into the love of God." This can mean God's love for us, or our love for God. Both are true and belong together. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Second, "into the endurance of Christ." This can mean the patient endurance Christ showed in His sufferings, which we are to follow, or the patient waiting for Christ's return. Both fit this letter.

A heart directed into the love of God and the endurance of Christ can face persecution, false teaching, and hard work without giving up. That is a prayer worth praying for ourselves and for others every day.

3:6 *Now we command you, brothers, in **the** name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to withdraw from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.*

Now Paul turns to the problem of idle believers. "Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the strongest language Paul uses in the letter. "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" means with His full authority. This is not just Paul's opinion.

"To withdraw from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us." To withdraw means to keep away, to pull back from close fellowship. The word disorderly is the same one Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, for a soldier who breaks rank and does not do his duty. Here, as the next verses show, it means believers who refused to work.

Notice that Paul calls such a person a "brother." He is still part of the church family. The point of withdrawing is not to throw him away but to bring him back.

"Not according to the tradition which he received from us." Paul had taught them how to live, including how to work (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). These idle members knew better. They were going against what the apostles had handed down.

3:7 *For you yourselves know how it is necessary to imitate us, because we were not disorderly among you,*

"For you yourselves know how it is necessary to imitate us." Paul points to his own life again, just as he did in the first letter (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:9). The Christian life is not just learned from words. It is learned by watching others and following their example.

"Because we were not disorderly among you." Paul and his team had not broken rank. They had done their duty. They did not sit around waiting for others to take care of them. They worked hard.

Could you tell younger believers to follow your example? That is a high standard, but it is what God calls every believer to grow toward (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17).

3:8 *nor did we eat bread from anyone without payment, but in labor and toil, working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you;*

"Nor did we eat bread from anyone without payment." To eat bread is a way of saying to make a living, to be fed. Paul did not take free meals from people. He paid his own way.

"But in labor and toil, working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you." These are almost the same words Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 2:9. Labor means hard work, and toil means work that wears you down. Paul worked as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3), from early in the morning until late at night, so that no one in Thessalonica would have to support him.

This was not easy work. Paul could have rested. Instead he set an example of hard, honest work while he preached the gospel. And when the church in Philippi sent him gifts, he received them gratefully (Philippians 4:16), but he did not demand them.

3:9 *not that we do not have authority, but that we might give ourselves* ***as*** *an example to you, so that you imitate us.*

"Not that we do not have authority." Paul makes it clear that he had the right to be supported by the church. Jesus Himself taught that "the worker is worthy of his food" (Matthew 10:10), and Paul wrote that "the Lord prescribed for those who proclaim the gospel to live from the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14). It is right for churches to support their pastors and missionaries.

"But that we might give ourselves as an example to you, so that you imitate us." Paul chose to set his right aside. Why? Because he knew some of them would be tempted toward idleness, and he

wanted to give them a living example of the opposite. He gave up something that was rightly his for the good of others.

That is a picture of the gospel. Christ gave up His rights for us (Philippians 2:5-8). Love is willing to give up what we could rightly claim, if it helps others grow.

3:10 *For even when we were with you, we were commanding you this, that if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat.*

"For even when we were with you, we were commanding you this, that if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat." Paul had taught this rule in person, more than once. It is short and plain.

Notice the words "not willing." Paul is not talking about people who cannot work because of sickness, age, disability, or because they cannot find work. The church has always been called to care for the weak and the needy (Acts 20:35; Galatians 6:10; 1 Timothy 5:3-16). Paul is talking about people who could work but would not. They chose to live off the generosity of others.

Why were they not working? Scripture does not say for sure. Some teachers think they believed the Lord's coming was so near that there was no point in working. Others think they were simply lazy and were taking advantage of richer believers who supported them, as many people in that day lived off wealthy patrons. It may have been some of both. Either way, the answer was the same: get back to work.

Work is not a result of the fall. God gave Adam work to do in the garden before sin came into the world (Genesis 2:15). Work is part of how we honor God and care for others (Ephesians 4:28).

3:11 *For we hear **that** some are walking among you disorderly, not working at all, but being busybodies.*

"For we hear that some are walking among you disorderly." Paul had heard reports, probably from those who carried his first letter or from other travelers. It was only some of them, not the whole church.

"Not working at all, but being busybodies." There is a play on words in the Greek. They were not busy, but they were busybodies. They were not working, but they were working around the edges of everyone else's business. They had time on their hands, and they used it to meddle in other people's lives.

That is what idleness often leads to. When we have nothing useful to do, we find something harmful to do. Proverbs warns the sluggard to "go to the ant" and "consider its ways" (Proverbs 6:6). And Paul warned about idle people who learn to go around from house to house, "gossips and busybodies" (1 Timothy 5:13). Gossip and laziness often travel together.

3:12 *Now to such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ, that working with quietness they may eat their own bread.*

"Now to such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul now speaks directly to the idle ones. He uses two words. He commands them, with authority. And he exhorts them, with encouragement and pleading. Notice he does it "through our Lord Jesus Christ." He speaks to them as fellow believers under the same Lord.

"That working with quietness they may eat their own bread." Paul tells them three things. Work. Do it with quietness, not stirring up trouble or meddling. And eat your own bread, the food you have earned, not food someone else paid for. This is the same thing he told them in the first letter: "to aspire to live quietly and to attend to your own affairs and to work with your own hands" (1 Thessalonians 4:11).

There is dignity in honest work. A believer who works quietly and supports himself honors the Lord.

3:13 *But you, brothers, do not grow weary doing good.*

"But you, brothers, do not grow weary doing good." Now Paul turns to the rest of the church, the ones who had been working and giving. They may have been tired of supporting people who would not work. They may have been tempted to stop giving altogether, even to those in real need.

Paul tells them not to give up. Keep doing good. The idle ones should not make you stop being generous to those who truly need help. Paul tells the Galatians the same thing: "let us not lose heart in doing the good, for in its own time we will reap" (Galatians 6:9).

Have you grown tired of doing good? Maybe you have been taken advantage of, or no one seems to notice what you do. The Lord notices. Keep going. He will reward you (Hebrews 6:10).

3:14 *And if anyone does not obey our word through the letter, take note of this* ***one****, and do not associate with him, so that he may be ashamed.*

"And if anyone does not obey our word through the letter, take note of this one." Paul expected most of the church to obey. But if anyone refused to obey what he wrote in this letter, the church was to take note of him. That means to mark him, to notice him, to be aware of who he is.

"And do not associate with him, so that he may be ashamed." To associate means to mix with, to have close fellowship with. The church was to pull back from close friendship with him. Paul used the same word in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 for dealing with a believer living in open sin.

What is the goal? "So that he may be ashamed." The purpose is not to punish him, but to bring him to his senses. Shame, when it leads to repentance, is a good thing. When the man sees that his brothers and sisters love him too much to go along with his sin, he may turn around. This is church discipline, and its goal is always restoration (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1).

3:15 *And do not regard **him** as an enemy, but admonish **him** as a brother.*

"And do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." This verse balances the one before it. The church was not to treat this man as an enemy or an outsider. He was still a brother. They were to admonish him, to warn him and correct him, with love.

This is important. Church discipline can easily turn harsh. People can become proud and cold, treating the person as if he were worthless. Paul says no. Keep warning him, as family. The door is always open for him to come back.

How do you treat a believer who is in the wrong? Do you write him off, or do you lovingly warn him? The goal is to win your brother back (Matthew 18:15).

3:16 *Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace continually in every way. The Lord **be** with you all.*

"Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace continually in every way." Paul closes the letter with another prayer. He calls Jesus "the Lord of peace." In the first letter he spoke of "the God of peace" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Peace comes from the Father and the Son together.

The Thessalonians needed peace in many ways. They had persecution from outside, false teaching that shook them, and idle members causing trouble inside. Paul prays for peace "continually," all the time, and "in every way," in every situation. Jesus said, "in Me you may have peace" (John 16:33). Real peace is not the absence of trouble. It is the presence of the Lord.

"The Lord be with you all." Paul says all, including the idle ones he just corrected. The Lord's presence is the greatest blessing anyone can have.

3:17 *The greeting by my own hand, of Paul, which is a sign in every letter; thus I write.*

"The greeting by my own hand, of Paul, which is a sign in every letter; thus I write." Paul usually dictated his letters to a helper who wrote them down. Romans 16:22 names one of these helpers, Tertius. At the end, Paul would take the pen and write a greeting in his own hand (1 Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:18).

Why does Paul point this out here? Because someone may have sent a letter "as if through us" (2:2). Paul's handwriting was the mark that proved a letter was really from him. The Thessalonians could look at the signature and know this letter was genuine.

This also reminds us that God took care to protect His Word as it was being written. The church was careful to receive only what truly came from the apostles. We can trust that the New Testament we have is the Word God gave through them.

3:18 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ **be** with you all. Amen.*

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." This is almost the same as the end of the first letter (1 Thessalonians 5:28), with one word added: all. Paul wanted grace for every one

of them, the strong and the weak, the faithful workers and the idle ones, the shaken and the steady.

Grace is how Paul began this letter (1:2), and grace is how he ends it. Everything in between, the comfort in persecution, the teaching about the day of the Lord, the commands about work, rests on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And grace is what we need until the day we see Him.

Summary

Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray that the word of the Lord would run and be honored as it had been among them, and that he would be delivered from perverse and evil men, since not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful and will strengthen them and guard them from the evil one. Paul is confident they will obey, and he prays that the Lord would direct their hearts into the love of God and the endurance of Christ. Then, in the name of the Lord Jesus, he commands the church to withdraw from any brother walking disorderly. He reminds them that he and his companions worked night and day so as not to be a burden, giving up their right to support to set an example. He had told them that if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat. He commands the idle busybodies to work quietly and eat their own bread, and he tells the rest not to grow weary in doing good. Anyone who will not obey is to be noted and avoided so that he will be ashamed, yet not treated as an enemy but warned as a brother. Paul prays for the Lord of peace to give them peace in every way, signs the letter with his own hand, and closes with grace for them all.

I have worked about 40 years, and I see my daily work as a way to honor God in all things. Work is not something to avoid. It is part of how we serve Him and others.

Study Questions

1. What two things did Paul ask the Thessalonians to pray for? (3:1-2)

2. What does Paul say the Lord will do for His people? (3:3)

3. Into what two things did Paul pray the Lord would direct their hearts? (3:5)

4. What example did Paul and his team set while they were in Thessalonica, and why? (3:7-9)

5. What rule had Paul given them about work, and who does it apply to? (3:10)

6. What were the idle members doing instead of working? (3:11)

7. How was the church to treat someone who would not obey, and what was the goal? (3:14-15)

8. Why did Paul point out his own handwritten greeting? (3:17; 2:2)

9. How do you see your daily work: as something to avoid, or as a way to honor God and serve others? (3:10-12)

10. Where have you grown weary in doing good, and what would help you keep going? (3:13)

Conclusion

1 and 2 Thessalonians are two short letters to a young church, but they carry a great deal. In the first letter, Paul looked back with thanks at how the gospel came to Thessalonica in power, how these believers turned to God from idols, and how they held on through trouble. He reminded them how he had lived among them, gentle like a mother and steady like a father, and he rejoiced at Timothy's good report. Then he looked ahead. He called them to holy living, brotherly love, and quiet, honest work, and he comforted them about believers who had died. In the second letter, Paul comforted them again in their persecution, corrected the false teaching that the day of the Lord had already come, and called the idle back to work.

Through both letters runs one great hope: the Lord Jesus is coming. Every chapter of the first letter ends looking to His coming, and the second letter shows us the order of what lies ahead. I believe the Scriptures teach that the Lord Himself will come for His church before the seven-year Tribulation. "The dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are living, who remain, will be caught away together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). After that, the day of the Lord will come on an unbelieving world, the man of sin will be revealed, and at the end of the Tribulation Christ will return visibly to the earth in flaming fire, destroy the lawless one by the appearing of His coming, and set up His kingdom. Good Bible teachers see some of these things differently, and I have tried to give their views fairly. But the heart of the hope is the same for all who belong to Jesus: we will always be with Him.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. When we do that with these letters, we find that Bible prophecy is not given to scare us or to start arguments. Paul gave it to brand new believers to comfort them, to steady them, and to keep them living faithfully. "Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18). The hope of His coming should make us holy, keep us awake and sober, keep us working with our hands, and keep us loving one another more and more while we wait.

Paul's message is the same for us today as it was for the believers in Thessalonica. "God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we keep watch or sleep, we may live together with Him" (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God.

Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and serve as part of the body of Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Old and New Testament Links in 1 and 2 Thessalonians

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
1 Thessalonians 3:13	Zechariah 14:5	alluded to
1 Thessalonians 5:8	Isaiah 59:17	alluded to
2 Thessalonians 1:8	Isaiah 66:15	alluded to
2 Thessalonians 1:9	Isaiah 2:10	alluded to
2 Thessalonians 1:9	Isaiah 2:19	alluded to
2 Thessalonians 2:4	Daniel 11:36	alluded to
2 Thessalonians 2:4	Ezekiel 28:2	alluded to
2 Thessalonians 2:4	Isaiah 14:13-14	alluded to
2 Thessalonians 2:8	Isaiah 11:4	alluded to
2 Thessalonians 3:1	Psalm 147:15	alluded to

Bibliography

The following sources were consulted for this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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Treasury of Scripture Knowledge. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, about 1830. Public domain.

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