

2 Thessalonians

“How shall we then live?”

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2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

“Three Tools to Triumph over Trials”

I.) Intro.

II.) Vs. 1-4 Praise

III.) Vs. 5-10 Promise

IV.) Vs. 11-12 Prayer

I.) Intro.

This area of the world where Paul writes his 2nd letter was part of Macedonia and the place where Paul had brought the gospel to Europe. It had been the kingdom of Alexander the Great, in fact Thessalonica was named after Alexander's half-sister. Within a few months of Paul's first letter being sent back to the church in Thessalonica word has gotten back to him while still in Corinth about their condition. When he took opportunity to write to them the first time after having only been with them 3 to 4 weeks Paul's concern was to praise, encourage and further instruct them with regards to the rapture and 2nd coming of Christ. Apparently his first letter wasn't well received or it miss the mark with regards to their misunderstanding as Paul needed to write this 2nd letter to make clear what these believers were still uncertain about. Paul praised its virtues least it be discouraged by its faults.

I'm certain most of us have had to write a 2nd letter or email to clear up our first correspondence, so from that standpoint alone I'm excited to take a look at this 2nd letter to the Thessalonians. *I'd be a miss if I didn't at least allude to the practical nature of God has He has in His wisdom used human confusion in correspondence as the place to hide His words to us in plain sight and language.* It seems to me to be a metaphor of this short three chapter letter... "God making plain what we humans are still confused about."

II.) Vs. 1-4 Praise

Apparently a false teacher sent a letter claiming to be from Paul that said that Christ had already come which caused them to lose hope. Paul begins this letter with what they needed to understand the most how to overcome suffering for their faith as he gives them ***three tools to overcome suffering: Praise, Promise and Prayer.***

Vs. 1-4 ***Praise: One of Satan's greatest tools to discourage believers is suffering:*** As such the greatest antidote for this is praise. Because of their suffering these saints had felt that they were not progressing in their walk but Paul tells them that their standing in God was well known. ***An easy life makes for a shallow faith, dear ones!*** Furthermore their love was abounding in their suffering because it was mixed with grace and faith! Suffering causes us to reach upward to God but it also causes us to reach outward in love. Their patience was increasing even as their suffering increased. These believers took the suffering to the throne of grace and waited in his loving arms.

Vs. 1-2 Paul uses the standard formula of greeting utilized in 1st century letters as they always identified the writer before they greeted the reader, which is just the opposite of how we do today. Think of how beneficial this would be with all the junk mail that is sent our way, as we could just toss it out. These three men were familiar to this church, they had been with them from the beginning so no doubt their introduction was well received.

I can't help but notice the twice repeated phrase in verses 1 and 2 of "*God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

- The 1st statement is one that shapes their ***identity*** as they are "***IN*** *God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

- The 2nd statement reveals what resources they have constantly at their disposal as
 “Grace and Peace which are **FROM** *God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

I love the simplicity that God has for His children when faced with the complexity of life, don't you? *No need to search earth for the treasures we so desperately need, when we can look up and see that they are laying in plain sight in heaven!*

Vs. 3-4 Paul says, “*We are bound to thank God always for you...*”! In Paul's first letter to them he said, “*We give thanks to God always for you all....remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope...*” Saint's adversity is not the tool of the enemy but the opportunity granted by God to reveal what otherwise would have often remained hidden the inward character and beauty of a life surrendered to the Lord! Notice that Paul doesn't include a part of their character that he first mentioned being present in his first letter? Paul said that there:

- “*faith grew exceedingly*”
- “*the love of every one of them all abounds towards each other*”

But Paul doesn't say in this 2nd letter anything of their “patience of hope”! Even though Paul shared about the soon return of Christ this church had lost its hope! *Don't pass by this to quickly as we can become discouraged when we don't have a clear understanding of whom we are waiting for.* Without a proper understanding of who we are waiting for our work will lose its urgency as I said last week. Church history is littered with generations of believers whose lost hope caused them to lose their faith and love as well.

III.) Vs. 5-10 Promise

Vs. 5-10 **Promise**: No matter how much these dear saints suffered Paul wanted them to realize that God would never break his promises to them. Those who rejected Him and persecuted those that He loved would have to deal with Him. And those that received His love would be glorified with Him. For the believer what awaits us is rest and reward, for the unrepentive they will be repaid for their rejection and persecution.

Paul moves on to tell these suffering saints three things about their suffering:

a.i.1. Vs. 5 **TRANSFORMATION**: **The fact that they had endured the suffering for their faith revealed that they had truly switched kingdoms.** The world's persecution served as proof that they were no longer living in this world and the fact that they were enduring proved that they were now fit for the kingdom of God. **Saints what we value reveals our values and Paul encourages these Christians for valuing life differently than they did before.**

a.i.2. Vs. 6-10 **CONSUMMATION**: **There suffering revealed the world's coming condemnation and their commencement.** When the world places someone in the "Hall of Fame" they do it on completely different criteria than God does. When you read through God's "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews chapter 11 you quickly discover the **common denominator was not their earthly achievements** but rather their **unwavering faith when facing the greatest suffering.** In verses Hebrews chapter 11 verses 36-38 we read of those in the Hall of Faith as having endured the "trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented--

of whom the world was not worthy.” Paul tell these suffering saints 2 important truths:

- a.i.2.a. Vs. 6, 8-9 **RETRIBUTION**: God’s judgment will come upon two classes of people: “*Those who do not know God*” and “*Those who do not obey the Gospel of Jesus*”. In fact Paul says that it would be unrighteous if God didn’t repay those who have treated those who have placed their faith in His Son. Their greatest punishment is getting what they wanted: **Never to be around the presence, power and glory of God.** C.S. described hell as a “*place where everybody will be at an infinite distance from everybody else so each person can have what they wanted without it infringing on another’s self-interest*”. Ah but they will have no relief from what they lusted from and they will have it to their own ruin for eternity!
- b. Vs. 7,10 **REWARD**: God is going to give rest as well as reward to believers for faith: God not only deals with the unrepentant Hitler’s of this world He will also bring “relief” which is the translation of the word rest in verse 7. A part of that “***relief***” is to ensure that the suffering of the saints will never be forgotten. But He will also glorify all those who glorified Him in this life. Paul tells us the timing of when this will all take place is a series of events known as the presence or “parousia” of Jesus. All of which Paul wrote to them about in his first letter in chapter 4:16-17.

IV.) Vs. 11-12 Prayer

a.i.1. Vs. 11-12 ***Prayer***: Finally Paul wanted them to realize that prayer is the key to their endurance during their suffering. The word “Therefore” suggests that the purpose of our present suffering ought to have positive present results in our day to day life. Paul’s prayer for these suffering saints was that they stay the course now that they knew the purpose of suffering and outcome to both those that have caused you to suffer and that those have suffered for their faith. Paul’s prayer for them was for ***three specific areas***:

a.i.1.a. **Worthiness**: Their calling was in grace and love and Paul’s prayer is that in spite of their present suffering that they would continue to live up to their calling. Suffering trials don’t make the person; they reveal what a person is made out of!

a.i.1.b. **Work**: Character always must lead to conduct and Paul prayed that their trials wouldn’t direct their walk or work instead he prayed that the Holy Spirit would direct and empower them to fulfill “*all the good pleasure of god’s goodness in them*”.

a.i.1.c. **Witness**: Despite the challenges of persecution Paul prayed that their witness to all would continue to be to God’s glory. This of course can only be accomplished by His power and grace working in our lives.

The only way we Christians can endure the stresses of life is that who we contain is greater than what causes the strain! Such knowledge concerning our suffering ought to

cause us to live differently. Do more of our prayers sound like, “*Lord, help me!*” or “*Lord help Yourself to me*”?

2 Thessalonians 2:1-7

III. 2:1-3:15 Main Teaching

A.) 2:1-17 What are you waiting for

“Christians: Character or Calendars?”

I.) Intro.

II.) Vs. 1-2 For His Church and with His Church

III.) Vs. 3-5 Words and there meanings

IV.) Vs. 6-7 The mystery of evil

I.) Intro.

We come now to the point in Paul’s letter where he clarifies what the church in Thessalonica had become confused about (verse 1 “...*concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him*”). Biblical prophecy was not put forth for Christians to make calendars placing information marking days and hours. No, it was given to build our character and encourage us to stay on course where God has placed. The church at Thessalonica reveals the danger of prophetic calendars for Christians as clearly someone had got these precious believers to start date setting instead of heart changing! To set their hearts back on coarse Paul had to reassure them that they weren’t on the same month as the Day of the Lord was on; in fact they weren’t on the calendar of God’s wrath at all. Based upon verse 2 the confusion had not come from Paul or his letters as he states that they “*not....be soon shaken in mind or troubled either by spirit, ... word or letter, as if FROM US.*” In verse 3 he says that their confusion had come about

from “*deception*”; finally in verse 5 he asks if they had “*forgotten what he had clearly taught them while he had been with them those 3 to 4 weeks*” with regards to this subject.

We can deduce two things from establishing the context:

a.i.1. Paul was not confused with regards to what he believed and taught with regards to this subject. He had not believed and then changed his mind or position, he had remained convinced of what he taught and still believed it to be true regardless of his or others personal experience.

a.i.2. This subject is one in which deliberate “*deception*” had been put forward. The deliberate deception was being put forward by the person Paul alludes to in verse 4, Satan. Satan wants the church to remain confused and indifferent about the events and the timing with regards to Jesus’ return and coming for His Church. I can deduce by this 2 things:

a.i.2.a. ***He knows that he lost at the cross and that his time as ruler of this world is short!***

a.i.2.b. ***His deception is designed to render the church less effective in the short time that he has left!***

II.) Vs. 1-2 For His Church and with His Church

Vs. 1-2 Paul mentions **the coming of our Lord Jesus *and* also our gathering together to Him** and implies a difference in the two events, essentially “**two**” comings of Jesus.

- One coming is ***for His church***
- The other one is coming ***with His church***, to judge a rebellious world.

Two parts of one great event! These two verses contain two important points:

a.i.2. First, Paul clearly states that he wants to clarify the coming of the Lord and then describes this as, “*our gathering together to Him*”. In 1 Thess. 4:16-17a Paul spoke of this event by saying, “*For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, ... And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*”. **If a person views Jesus “coming” and**

His gathering together as two events happening within a short period of time then our “gathering together” would have to be at the end of the tribulation period (post-trib). The key to the interpretation is in the Greek as the word “*parousia*” can be rendered “*coming*” but it carries the meaning and emphasis upon the Lord’s “*presence*”. The context of word must be interpreted upon what Paul had already said in 1 Thess. 4:16-17a where he said that “*we who are alive, who are left, shall be **caught up together** with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*”. If we who are alive and on earth are “*caught up...to meet Jesus in the air*” clearly the coming of the Lord is in His presence in the air and not His physical appearance upon the earth.

a.i.3. The 2nd thing we need to consider is what was the “*soon shaken in mind or troubled by spirit, word or letter*” a good thing or a bad thing? Something had begun to happen to these believers that caused them to think that they had already begun and were going through the “*day of the Lord*” or the great tribulation. They had Paul’s first letter where he described this time in chapter 5 verse 3 as a time when “*sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.*” These poor saints were being heavily persecuted and it seems as though some false teachers by “*word or letter*” had suggested that they were in the great tribulation. The key then of interpretation lies with the words “*soon shaken in mind or troubled by spirit, word or letter*”.

Was their shaken in mind or troubled be the spirit positive or negative? The post-trib position has to interpret the Thessalonians “soon shaken in mind or troubled by spirit, word or letter” as an excitement, as one post-tribulation

commentator put is as a “wild anticipation of the immediate return of Christ.”

The phrase means to be shaken out of your mind, driven to wits end. These believers were not excited and jazzed about the soon coming of the Lord they were scared out of their minds because they believed they had missed the rapture which meant that they weren't presently believers!

III.) Vs. 3-5 Words and there meanings

Vs. 3-5 These three verses also need to be carefully interpreted and two question jump out immediately:

a.i.3.a. Paul says, “Let no one deceive you” and the question is why he didn't simply say “If this is the tribulation period you wouldn't be here!” This letter is a “**general letter**” written to a church made up of many different people that Paul hadn't met and couldn't be sure that they were believers. Giving such blanket assurance without knowing exactly who would read this letter would offer false assurance, something Paul would not wanted to do.

a.i.3.b. There is also the question with regards to the meaning of the phrase “falling away” in verse 3. In the **Greek** the word is “*apostasia*” which is commonly translated “*apostasy*” or “*falling away*” but here it has a definite article placed with the word which means that Paul had already told them about this, something that verse 5 further reveals. Paul hadn't written to them about a “**falling away**” of the church but he had written to them about a being “caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” in 1 Thess. 4:16-17a. The way this word is written here in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 3 appears nowhere else

in the New Testament and as such its meaning must be interpreted by the context here and when we do that we note that this compound word is made up of two words, “AWAY” and “STANDING” thus the words translation is **NOT** “*falling away*” but “*standing away*”. This combined with the fact that Paul had made no previous mention of a *falling away* and instead had made mention of a “*gathering together*” gives us the meaning of the word as a “*standing away*” of all believers for a departure to meet the Lord in the air. Even if we don’t want to take this word to mean “*standing away*” and prefer to interpret it “*falling away*” there is **no indication that Paul would be using that in conjunction of the church**. In fact if we compare this apostasy with Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:15-21 the apostasy that Paul is writing about here has to do with the event which reveals the “*son of perdition, the man of sin*” not the rapture of the church as the context clearly indicates.

In verse 4 Paul describes the scene that Jesus spoke about to His Jewish disciples in Matthew 24:15-21 and in verse 5 indicates that he had spoken to them about this while he was with them which the 5 chapter of his first letter goes over the timing of the great tribulation saying that they “*are not in the darkness, so that this day should overtake them as a thief.*” And just in case he hadn’t been clear Paul went on to say in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 9 that, “*God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...*”

IV.) Vs. 6-7 The mystery of evil

Vs.6-7 Paul says that the Day of the Lord cannot come until the man of sin the son of perdition is revealed and that cannot happen until what is “*restraining...is taken out of the way.*” That leads to yet another question:

- “*What is that which is restraining that is prevent this from happening*”?

Paul tells them in verse 6 that “*they know what is restraining!*” Every believer knows what it is that restrain evil in their life! **The Holy Spirit indwells us and it is He who restrains us from evil.** Not only does the Holy Spirit restrain us from evil personally He works through the Church to do this corporately as Jesus described His church as the “*Salt of the earth*”. In ancient times salt was used as a preservative to arrest corruption and decay. It was also used as an antiseptic to keep away infection. Jesus also called His church the light of the world and light by its very nature reveals that which would otherwise be hidden and warns that which otherwise would be overrun with darkness and cold. Paul says that there is a “*mystery of lawlessness*” which is already at work in humanity. People are self-destructive engaging in things that destroy them. With all our education and scientific advancements humanity has not educated or eradicated human wickedness as people are still struggling with the same evils for thousands of years. Where is this illusive “*Age of Aquarius*” that the Fifth Dimension sung about in the 60’s? We have seen in human history great times when the church through awakenings have pushed back the tide of evil to where the things that hold so many were temporarily abolished but they have come back. When the Church surrenders to the Lord and is revived and awakened moral awakening occurs but when the Church becomes more interested in serving their lusts the world suffers! Verse 7 gives us the answer to this question as it says “... *only he who now restrains will do so*

until he is out of the way.” That phrase “*out of the way,*” is literally, “*becomes out of the midst.*” It does not say the Holy Spirit is “*taken out of the midst*”; it says that the Holy Spirit, “*becomes out of the midst.*” Paul tells these believers that when the Church through whom the Holy Spirit is working to restrain sin in the world is removed... **not the Holy Spirit just His work through the Church** of restraining then the Lawless one in accordance with satan will have complete access to humanity. This will end with the unveiling of Jesus as he comes with us back to earth.