

R U Ready? 1-2 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians 2

Part of our worship life while here on earth is love for God through our obedience to Jesus (John 14:15) before He returns. Paul makes it clear in this week's passage that—in a very real sense—our whole life now is one spent in God's waiting room. No, we're not waiting to see the dentist or doctor, but our Saviour Jesus face to face! Our anticipation of the Lord's return should motivate and inspire us to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16)—right now. And Apostle Paul is one of the great spiritual encouragers of all time, bringing doctrinal and prophetic correction and encouragement to God's children. This is Paul's prayer:

1Thessalonians 3:13

May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

In this week's passage, Paul clears up some misunderstandings, brings comfort, and encourages the Thessalonians—and us—to stand firm and stay holy.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

(KJV) Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

(NIV) Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come.

Paul is responding to what must have been a prophetic word given, or a conversation had, or a written word sent to the believers at Thessalonica, falsely claiming that the day of the Lord had already happened.

As in the case of all the Pauline letters, Paul is writing in response to a spiritual crisis and/or exhorting, correcting, or encouraging the churches he helped to birth. Our responsibility as Biblical readers in 2023 is to keep the text in context without pretext—pray over it, meditate upon it—and then apply to our lives what God intends.

as that the day of Christ is at hand. Here we have the troubling word that was causing doubt and discouragement among Paul's children in the faith. The implication that the day of the Lord was already in progress (as evidenced by the persecution they were suffering), or that the day of the Lord had already happened (and therefore their deceased loved ones in Christ were left behind) had such a negative impact that Paul in writing needs to both comfort and correct the church.

***QUESTION FOR MEDITATION:** Have you ever been fed information from an anonymous source that caused you untold grief and stress? And then learned that the information was false? What did you learn from this deception? How might you filter future claims of truth in order to protect your heart?

***STUDY POINT:** Find and write down at least ten Scriptures from the New Testament that would be an effective spiritual filter for discerning truth from error. Also, underneath each of these Scriptures, write out how these words of truth might make all the difference in your spiritual discernment.

Paul reminds them to stand firm in what they first were taught by himself, Silas, and Timothy. This new information, wherever it came from, did not originate from Paul's team. As is typical modus operandi for Satan, he plants doubtful thoughts in the minds of believers in order to confuse and discourage:

Matthew 13:24-25

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.

Genesis 3:1

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

This subtle doubt-causing of Satan always happens after we have received the truth of God's Word and taken a stand on it:

1Corinthians 15:1-2

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

Paul to the rescue! He lovingly reminds them to "be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled," by falsehood from false teachers.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-5

(KJV) Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

(NIV) Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is

worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

When he was with the Thessalonians in person, Paul had indeed taught them this truth—repeatedly and emphatically—about what needed to happen before the day of the Lord would occur. From these three verses, we glean the following details about the “falling away.” These are excerpts from John MacArthur’s Commentary:

- The Day of the Lord cannot occur until a deliberate abandonment of a formerly professed position, allegiance, or commitment occurs.
- Paul has in mind the apostasy.
- This is an event which is clearly and specifically identifiable and unique, the consummate act of rebellion, an event of final magnitude.
- The key to identifying the event is to identify the main person, which Paul does, calling him the "man of sin."
- The context and language clearly identify a real person in future times who actually does the things prophesied of him in Scripture. He is also called "the son of perdition" or destruction, a term used of Judas Iscariot (John 17:12). "The falling away" is the abomination of desolation that takes place at the midpoint of the Tribulation, spoken of in Dan 9:27; Dan 11:31; and Mat 24:15.
- This man is not Satan, although Satan is the force behind him (2Th 2:9) and he has motives like the desires of the devil (cf. Isa 14:13-14).
- Apparently, he will be seen as supportive of religion so that God and Christ will not appear as his enemies until the apostasy.

So, brethren, the key characteristic of the evil one is that he is subtil or crafty (Genesis 3:1). This gradual sowing of tares amidst the wheat can happen over generations, as we see in 1 and 2 Kings specifically, and throughout the Old Testament generally. And as we see in our own ancestry. Ultimately, though, we are each accountable to God our Creator as individual persons—given the testimony of God through awesome nature, and the created universe, human conscience, and freewill. All declared in Scripture.

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7

(KJV) And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

(NIV) And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.

It is common in our day to lament the awful state of our world. Headlines and news reports are apt to cause us depression and hopelessness—apart from the hope we have in Jesus. But the Biblical reality is that things are going to get much, much worse. Right now, today, the Holy Spirit and the angels in heaven are holding back the horrific scenes of good versus evil that must occur before the day of the Lord:

Revelation 7:1-4

And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed a hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.

Paul reviews as a comfort with the Thessalonians what “withholdeth” until the last days play out. I will read the following five verses in my modern translation without commenting (see our print study for more details). Note, as I’m reading, Who finally has the victory!

2 Thessalonians 2:8-12

(KJV) And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

(NIV) And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

This progressive falling away of humankind from God is vividly described in Romans 1:18-32. The culmination through time of our rebellion and piled-up iniquity to the sky does not in any way hinder God’s mercy and judgment on the cross of Calvary. Christ Jesus wins! Whether it is the nations, the cities, the towns, the tribes, the households, the families, the men, women, or children who oppose Jesus—those “who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness”—will surely perish. And needlessly, for salvation is found in Christ alone (Acts 4:12).

These next five verses belong together:

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

(KJV) But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

(NIV) But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Stand firm and stay holy. This is how we could summarize Paul's final words in 2 Thessalonians 2. And for those of us today standing on the cusp of the last days and eternity—Paul's words to stand firm on the Biblical truth we initially learned and will forever grow therewith—we can likewise be encouraged.

Hallelujah!

~ Reverend Darren McClelland