



2 THESSALONIANS

A Study of Paul's Letters to a New and Growing Church with a Hopeful Future

◆ **Wednesday, May 13, 2009**
(2 Thessalonians 1 – 2:12)

Facts About 2 Thessalonians

1. Written again by Paul in Corinth a few months after his first letter, Paul continued to speak about the end times and correct the facts about it due to the fact some false teaching was continuing. This teaching was erroneously suggesting that the “Day of the Lord” (God’s wrath) had come and that they had missed out on the Rapture.
2. The pressure and persecution from hostile Jews and Pagan Gentiles continued to increase and Paul wanted to continue to encourage them
3. The church began to have some “church discipline” issues due to some disorderly behavior and laziness within the congregation, but still for the most part the church remained healthy amidst the persecution and bad teaching floating around.

^{2TH 1:3} We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. ⁴ Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

v. 3 – “we ought always to thank” – NKJV says, “we are bound to thank.”

Paul here communicates that there is a sense of obligation or duty to be overtly thankful that should weigh heavily upon us whenever we see God at work in the lives of people AND that we should be quick to tell others what we see (in a positive sense).

This raises a question: **Are we only thankful when we see blessings that come that are predominately related to our own lives?**

Note: This is the opposite of “**covetousness.**” (Exodus 20:17) We should be thankful to God for the blessings we see happening in other people’s lives.

Note: Increasing in faith means increasing in love – they go hand in hand.

v.4 – Paul indicates to them that he is very much aware of the trials they are going through and that he is telling others about it (Boasting about their perseverance and faith).

Pastoral effects of this – helps prevent a sense of isolation and loneliness in suffering and encourages/motivates them to persevere all the more!

^{1 COR 12:26} **If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.**

2TH 1:5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.

SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

- v. 5 - The faith and character being produced in them as a result of these trials was “proof” that they were Christians whom God now regarded as “worthy of being in the kingdom.” It’s not that their suffering was earning them salvation, but that their suffering and **perseverance within that suffering** was a sign that they were already counted and recognized as saved.

Leon Morris comments on suffering:

The NT does not look on suffering in quite the same way as do most modern people. To us it is in itself an evil, something to be avoided at all costs. Now while the NT does not gloss over this aspect of suffering it does not lose sight either of the fact that in the good providence of God suffering is often the means of working out God's eternal purposes. It develops in the sufferers qualities of character. It teaches valuable lessons. Suffering is not thought of as something which may possibly be avoided by the Christian. For him it is inevitable. He is ordained to it (1 Thess. 3:3). He must live out his life and develop his Christian character in a world that is dominated by non-Christian ideas. His faith is not some fragile thing, to be kept in a kind of spiritual cotton wool, insulated from all shocks. It is robust. It is to be manifested in the fires of trouble, and in the furnace of affliction....the very troubles and afflictions which the world heaps on the believer become, under God, the means of making him what he ought to be. *Suffering, when we have come to regard it in this light, is not to be thought of as evidence that God has forsaken us, but as evidence that God is with us...such suffering is a vivid token of the presence of God.* New International Commentary on the NT, 197-198.

John MacArthur writes,

Their focus was not on personal comfort, fulfillment, and happiness, but on the glory of God and the fulfillment of His purposes. They were not moaning about the injustice of their persecutions. Rather, they were patiently enduring the sufferings they did not deserve. This very attitude was “manifest evidence” or positive proof that God's wise process of purging, purifying, and perfecting through suffering was working to make His beloved people worthy of the kingdom by being perfected. (NT Commentary)

Note: “God's judgment” named here is not to be seen as everlasting condemnation of sin which we as Christians have no part in (Rom. 8:1), but rather should be seen as God's positive, formative, chastening discipline. For example,

^{HEB 12:7} Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

⁶ God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷ and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power ¹⁰ on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

GOD WILL REPAY – HIS JUDGMENT ON SIN AND PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

The fire of God's righteous judgment (the persecutions he ordains them to go through) will help to purify and perfect his people, but for those who are wicked, His future judgment will be much more severe, as it will ultimately result in their eternal condemnation.

God will judge evil men in the future when He is revealed as Judge:

- 1) At the end of the tribulation (v. 10; Matthew 13:36-43; Matthew 25:31-46)
- 2) And then finally, at the end of the millennium (Revelation 20:11-15)

Basis of punishment:

- 1) NO personal relationship with Jesus ("do not know God" – v.8)
- 2) Rejection of the Gospel ("do not obey the gospel" – v.8)
- 3) Their persecution of God's people ("those who trouble you" – v.6)

Description of punishment:

- 1) Everlasting hell or destruction – *ruin and not annihilation*
- 2) Shut out from God's presence and glory – "majesty of his power"

The Lord will come with blazing fire (judgment) along with his powerful angels! All believers will marvel at his glory and power! This includes the Thessalonians because they believed. They will have rest, a new glorified body (Phi. 3:21), while at the same time basking in God's glory!

NOTE: v. 7 – The Lord Jesus is "revealed" -- Greek word is *apokalupsis* (apocalypse)

In this sense he will be revealed to those who "do not know" Him. To those who have no faith, he is "hidden" from them, but one day He will be physically revealed to them.

^{2TH 1:11} With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. ¹² We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY FOR?

Paul prays for:

- 1) That God would work in their lives (spiritual growth) in order to make them worthy of their calling as Christians (cf. Eph. 4:1), or in other words, that they would live righteously so that they would "become more deserving to bear His name."

^{PHP 1:27} **Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.**

- 2) That God's power would enable them to complete (fulfill) every righteous desire that is found in their hearts.
- 3) That God's power would grant them the ability to complete every action that is derived out of their faith.

NOTE: The reliance on God's power that is needed for everything we do.

EPH 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

The End GOAL – That by the power of His grace, God may be glorified in our lives.

Questions: Where are you seeing God's power at work in your life? What is your faith prompting you to do? What desires do you have to serve the Lord? How is God at work in your life making you worthy to bear His name?

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

2TH 2:1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.

Apparently, the church thought they had missed the Rapture and that because of their persecutions they were already in the infamous time of the wrath of God which is describes as the "Day of the LORD." They had expected to be raptured before His wrath came, and so this is why they were shocked.

HEY POST-TRIBBERS, NOTE!: If they had expected the rapture to happen **after the tribulation (which is what post-tribulation rapture advocates believe)**, then the church would have been very excited that the rapture was coming soon! But as it was, they were alarmed and unsettled since they were expecting to be raptured out first before the Day of the LORD, why is why they were flustered when someone erroneously told them the Day of the LORD has come!

That's why I believe in a pre-tribulation Rapture. ☺

Other notes:

* Some false teachers were using Paul's name (deceitfully) to try to gain sanction to their teaching.

THE ANTICHRIST ARRIVES AFTER THE RAPTURE, DURING THE TRIBULATION, AND PRIOR TO THE CLIMAX OF IT KNOWN AS “THE DAY OF THE LORD”

³ 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. ⁴ 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.

What will happen prior to the “Day of the Lord?”

1) **A Worldwide Rebellion** against God and Truth occurs (known as “The Apostasy”)

What is this Rebellion?

It would seem that this term, *apostasia*, was used in early Greek writings to refer to either **political revolt** (as in the writing of the Jewish historian *Josephus*) or **religious defection** (as in Acts 21:21). Both ideas seem to be in view here, since in the next verses Paul talks about a political rule of the Anti-Christ that also includes the worship of him as God.

Thus, there is some world-wide political and religious event that happens that in connection with the Anti-Christ.

2) The “**Man of Lawlessness** is Revealed”

NOTE: ^{1JN 3:4} **Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.**

As a title then, the “**Man of Lawlessness**” or “**Man of Sin**” is a man who himself embodies open rebellion and sin against God, and he is empowered by Satan (v.9).

Other titles for him include:

- 1) The “**Man Doomed to Destruction**,” or literally the “Son of Perdition” (title also used of Judas Iscariot, John 17:12)
- 2) “**Ruler or Prince who is to come**” - Daniel 9:26
- 3) “**Little Horn**” – Daniel 7:8
- 4) “**The Beast**” – Revelation 13

More About the Antichrist.

- 1) He will oppose everything that is of God (v.4)
- 2) He will assert himself as deity or God (v.4) *See also Daniel 11:36-45*
- 3) He will set himself up in the temple as “God” (v.4). Jesus may have referred to him or a tribute to him in Matthew 24:15 as the “abomination that causes desolation.”

^{MT 24:15} “So when you see standing in the holy place `the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand-- ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

- 4) He will make a covenant with the nation of Israel at the beginning of the 7 year Tribulation only to break the covenant with them 3½ years into it (Daniel 9:27)
- 5) He will be overthrown and destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ (v.8)
- 6) He will display counterfeit miracles, signs, wonders, and evil (since he is empowered by Satan (v. 9-10)

^{2TH 2:5} Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? ⁶ And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

v. 5 – Paul had verbally taught them about this before but needed to remind them of it here.

v.6 – “Now you know what is holding him back”

What is holding back the revelation or unveiling of the Anti-Christ?

- 1) Paul asserts that the church knew already – **but do we know today?**
- 2) We can be sure that **something greater** than the Anti-Christ and his power is holding him back or restraining him, because he is said to be a man of great power (miracles, signs, etc.) and evil as we mentioned above. He essentially will be ruling the world, so a “world power” cannot be the thing holding him back, such as a country, a leader, a league of nations, etc.
- 3) Loads of speculation exists, but it would seem that it is **God’s power** that is holding him back and restraining him until it’s his time to rule the world and lead it into apostasy.
- 4) In fact, v.7 – reveals the **power of lawlessness** is being held back **by a person** – “The One,” and this can be nothing less than God himself (the Holy Spirit). So it would make sense that it would be **God** who is holding back the “Lawless One.”

NOTE: God revealed the Messiah to the earth “when the time had fully come” (Gal. 4:4), and so it is logical to conclude that it will be God who will reveal the Anti-Christ as well.

v. 7 – “The secret power of lawlessness is already at work.”

Though the Anti-Christ is restrained at the moment, evil is not fully restrained, for clearly the “power of sin” is at work in the world today. HOWEVER, it is kept in check in some sense by the Holy Spirit so that it is not as “bad as it could be” in the world today by evil unrestrained.

NOTE: Daniel 9:27 states that the Anti-Christ will not be fully revealed until he sets himself up as God in the temple, and that this happens halfway through the Tribulation period. Therefore, **“the removal of the Holy Spirit’s restraint cannot be identified with the Rapture of the Church, since that even takes place three and a half years earlier, before the Tribulation.”** (MacArthur, *NT Commentary*, p. 279).

Further, since God is omnipresent, to be “taken out of the way” cannot mean that the Spirit leaves the world, rather simply that He ceases to restrain any longer the Anti-Christ and evil that will abundantly prevail.

v.8 – The Anti-Christ will be destroyed by the breath of His mouth (see Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21), or the spoken word of God that will take place at the splendor of Christ’s coming back to earth prior to the millennium.

v. 10b – The Anti-Christ will be a master of evil, deceiving those who continue to reject the Gospel

¹¹ For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie ¹² and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

OOOOH, A TOUGH ONE, FOR NEXT TIME!

Our next and final class:

May 27 - 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:18
Standing Firm in Faith
Spiritual and Physical Laziness

FINAL EXAM