

## Lesson 1

# Paul and the Thessalonian Church

## 1 Thessalonians 1:1

### Thessalonica

Thessalonica was located in the northern most corner of the Thermaic Gulf, not far from the mouth of the Axios River. Great dockyards are said to have been located there during Roman times. The Via Egnation Way also passed through the city so there was a continual flow of traffic between Rome and the eastern provinces. After Rome conquered the city in 168 B. C., it was made the capital of one of the four provinces into which Macedonia was divided. Later, when Macedonia was reunited as one province, it was made capital over the whole region.

Originally the town was called Therma, probably because of the hot springs in the area. In 315 B. C., Cassander built a new city near Therma and renamed it for his wife, Thessalonica. She was the daughter of Philip II and Alexander the Great's step-sister. Probably because of its good location, the city has often been captured. The Saracens conquered it in A. D. 904, followed by the Normans in 1185 and the Turks in 1430. In 1912, the Greeks conquered it and have maintained it to this very day under the name of Salonika.

### The Macedonian Call

The second missionary journey began shortly after the conference in Jerusalem. Because they could not agree on John Mark, Barnabas and Paul separated. Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus, while Paul took Silas and "went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches" (Acts 15:36-41). At Derbe and Lystra, a young Christian named Timothy was recommended by the brethren to Paul. The apostle had him circumcised, probably because he was from a Jewish mother, and took him with him as they delivered the message of the conference to the Gentile Christians. The churches grew in faith and increased in numbers as well (Acts 15:36-16:5).

Just west of the cities in south Galatia was the Roman province of Asia. At this time, Luke says Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to enter that region to teach. This might have been done directly or through the agency of a prophet inspired by the Spirit (compare Acts 20:23; 21:10-11). Later in Acts 19, Paul did get his opportunity to preach in Asia and the church grew there in a fine way, as is evidenced by the Lord's letters in Revelation 2-3. Apparently, Paul and those with him continued to work their way along until they came to Mysia, which was at the northern border between Asia and Bithynia. They would have gone into Bithynia, but the Spirit again forbade them to go, so they turned westward to Troas. Bithynia may have later heard the word through the preaching of Peter (1 Peter 1:1).

Paul and his company determined, after a vision the apostle had in the night, that the Lord wanted them to preach in Macedonia. So, they immediately made

arrangements and set sail from Troas to Samothrace, then Neapolis and, finally, Philippi (Acts 16:6-12), which Luke described as "the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony."

### **Preaching in Thessalonica**

Luke did not tell Theophilus why Paul passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia. He did explain that the next stop on this second missionary tour was Thessalonica. Hiebert says, "The majority of the Thessalonians were native Greeks." He then adds, "A sprinkling of Romans and Orientals lived there, and because of the attractive commerce at Thessalonica, there was a large Jewish colony in the city." When Paul arrived there, as is recorded in Acts 17, there was a synagogue of the Jews there and a great number of God-fearing Greeks. As was his habit, Paul went to the synagogue for three consecutive Sabbath days to reason with the Jews.

The very idea of a crucified Messiah was a stumbling block to the Jews (1 Corinthians 1:23), but Paul argued from the prophets that such was precisely what God had foretold (Isaiah 53). He further established that God had planned and accomplished Jesus' resurrection from the dead and made Him King over His people (Acts 2:22-36; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The scriptural evidence was supported by the miracles worked by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

During Paul's three weeks teaching in the synagogue, he and Silas worked with their own hands to support themselves (1 Thessalonians 2:9). In the Philippian letter (4:16), it becomes clear the apostle also received support from the brethren in Philippi on at least two occasions. The combination of scriptural preaching, miracles and the apostle's obvious commitment to reach the lost had its desired effect as some Jews, Greeks who worshipped God and prominent women from the community obeyed the gospel (Acts 17:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).

### **A Different Response to the Gospel**

It might be said that all the Jews responded to Paul's preaching. Those unconverted by the gospel gathered a mob, described by Luke as "vile fellows of the rabble," and sought to take Paul and Silas by force from Jason's house where they had been staying. When they could not find the two missionaries, they dragged Jason and some brethren before the rulers of the city. They accused Paul and Silas of being part of the number who turned the world upside down. They also said Paul and Silas were stirring up insurrection against Rome by calling for allegiance to another King, Jesus.

Hiebert calls the magistrates' settlement of the case a shrewd one. They thought the matter serious enough to require security, perhaps like a property bond, of Jason and the others, warning that it would be forfeited if any further disturbance occurred. This satisfied the accusers, proved the magistrates were loyal to Rome and was a mild penalty for the Christians. However, it meant Paul and Silas would have to leave town, especially for the safety of fellow Christians. Under these difficult conditions, Paul and Silas were sent away by night to Berea, some 60 miles away (Acts 17:5-10a).

## **The Date of the First Letter to Thessalonica**

Clearly, Paul did not leave at a time of his choosing. It is likely Paul did not stay as long as he would have liked. There can be no doubt that he desired to be with them again and had concern for their spiritual well-being. When he saw that he would be unable to visit them personally, Paul sent Timothy to check on their spiritual condition (2:17-3:5).

Paul wrote the first letter to Thessalonica when Timothy returned with his report from the first visit. From Acts 18:1-5, we know Timothy and Silas returned from Macedonia while Paul was in Corinth. We assume this letter was written from Corinth. Acts 18:12 indicates Paul's stay was during the time of the proconsul Gallio. An inscription found in 1909 at Delphi names Gallio proconsul at the time of the 26th acclamation of Emperor Claudius. This would place Paul in Corinth somewhere from A. D. 50 to 54. Any date during that time frame is possible.

## **The Purpose of the Letter**

The letter seems to have several purposes. As with most of Paul's letters, there are commendations that would encourage the brethren to continue in good works they were doing. There is a section devoted to a defense of Paul's actions while he was with them that may indicate he was answering some accusers. A plea for them to continue in Christian purity is also a part of the epistle. In addition, there is a very important section on the Lord's second coming which seems to answer some questions that were troubling them.

## **Greetings**

Paul, Silvanus, which is the Roman name of Silas, and Timothy were together in Corinth at the time this book was written (Acts 18:1-5). All three may have been together when the gospel was first introduced to Thessalonica. Certainly, Timothy knew the brethren since Paul had sent him to check on their status (1 Thessalonians 3:1-6). This letter is addressed to the church, or called out which would be the local body of God's people, of the Thessalonians (Ephesians 1:22-23). To be in the church is to be in God and Christ. Thus, we have an intimate relationship with the eternal Father and his Son who is both master and king. The closeness of the Father and Son can be seen, in part, because Christians are said to be in both of them. Also, Paul's desire for the church at Thessalonica was that those two divine persons would bestow their favor and peace of mind upon the brethren.



## Lesson 2

# The Good Example of the Thessalonians

## 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

### Thanking God for the Thessalonians

When Paul prayed, he thanked God for all of the brethren at Thessalonica. He knew the persecution that church had endured almost from its beginning, so he may have been thankful both for their conversion and steadfastness. He certainly was thankful for them because he constantly remembered their faith, love and hope. Those three words are used together in other portions of the apostle's writings (1 Corinthians 13:13; Colossians 1:3-5; Romans 5:1-5). Notice that the Thessalonian brethren had a faith that worked (James 2:17; Galatians 5:6). Their love of God and their fellowmen was displayed in untiring works in behalf of them. The brethren did not stop working because of the hope of heaven. Shepherd says the word patience describes "endurance in toil or trial." Paul reminded the church that all its actions were visible to the all-seeing eye of God our heavenly Father (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3).

Those who displayed a true love for God by following His will were, as a group, chosen of God before the world began (Ephesians 1:3-4, 9-11). Those answering the gospel call were described by Paul as God's elect, another description of those chosen (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). The words "our gospel" may refer merely to the good news Paul, Silas and Timothy preached among them, or to that which all the apostles preached. Really, either is true because they are one and the same (1 Corinthians 15:1-11). It was proven to be the word of God by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:9; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:2-4). Further, Paul and his companions kept the truth out of the field of controversy by conducting themselves in an exemplary manner. As is seen later in this letter, the apostles even worked at physical jobs so they would not burden young converts with the expense of supporting them (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5).

### The Reception the Thessalonians Gave the Gospel

Paul indicated his attitude toward others following him in 1 Corinthians 11:1. He only wanted others to follow him as he followed Christ (1 Peter 2:21). So, it should not surprise us that he said the brethren at Thessalonica, "became followers of us and of the Lord." Unfortunately, they also had to endure almost immediate persecution after they became Christians (Acts 17:5-9). They not only endured such, but rejoiced. That is not a normal reaction. With the Holy Spirit's help, they were able to rejoice in times of affliction (Hebrews 12:2; Acts 5:41). Joy is one of the fruits of the spirit and can be seen in a number of lives in scripture (Galatians 5:22-23; Acts 8:39; 16:23-25, 34).

At the time of Paul's writing, Greece was divided into two areas, Macedonia and Achaia. The faith of the brethren at Thessalonica, especially as shown through joy during times of suffering, had been an example to both of these areas as well as all other

places that had news from Thessalonica. This was because their lives, as directed by the word of God, had sounded out like a trumpet. As a crossroads and commercial center, Thessalonica was an ideal place for faithful Christians to live. When Paul said their faith had gone out, he used the perfect tense which would literally mean reports of their faith had gone out and continued to go out (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8).

### **Things Reported About Them**

The general report Paul had concerning the church was that they had turned from idol worship to serve the living and true God. The word "declare", which could also be translated report, is also in the perfect tense which means reports kept on being made by various ones. Idols are lifeless, therefore unable to help worshippers (Isaiah 44:14-20). God has always existed and is sustained by His own power, so He is always able to help those who voluntarily become His servants, or slaves (Exodus 3:13-14; Romans 6:16-18).

Christ promised He would return again. The angels confirmed that promise at the time of His ascension (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11). New Testament Christians should live in expectant hope of that coming (1 Corinthians 16:22; Revelation 22:20). The exact time of that coming is unknown, so Christians should live in a state of constant preparedness (Matthew 25:36-42; 25:13; 2 Peter 3:9-14). Christ's resurrection from the dead is clear proof that he is the Son of God. Such a demonstration of power leaves no doubt concerning His ability to come again to receive His disciples, as He promised, as well as save them from God's wrath against sinful men (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; Ephesians 5:6; Romans 1:18, 32; 2:6-9).



### Lesson 3

# Paul's Life Among the Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

## Paul's Arrival in Thessalonica

Paul reminded the Thessalonian brethren that the purpose of his coming and the message preached in that coming were not empty. Either they had heard or he had told them about the beating and imprisonment he and Silas had endured at Philippi (Acts 16). If they had been preaching some meaningless message for trivial reasons, such would have stopped them. However, when they came to Thessalonica they courageously preached the gospel. That courage came from being in God (Romans 8:31). The apostle described that persecution as a conflict, which could have come in the form of external pressure or the internal stress it produced. The point is, in spite of great difficulties, Paul and Silas preached openly a message that had already brought pain and hurt into their lives (1 Thessalonians 2:1-2).

## Motives Behind Paul's Preaching

In a city filled with idol worship, the presentation of a religious message without trickery being used for personal gain would surely impress the hearers. Also, Paul and his associates had not preached with any impure motives from a moral standpoint. The word "guile" deals with the method of presentation. Their method was not filled with deceitful trickery intended to lead the hearers astray.

The word "approved" is in the perfect tense which indicates he had been in the past and was approved at the time of writing. The only approval Paul was interested in was God's. He keenly felt the responsibility God had given him when he placed the gospel in his trust and charged him with going to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). So, he did not try to impress men but to please God by preaching His whole counsel (Acts 20: 26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:1-2; Galatians 1:10). God knew Paul's every purpose in preaching the gospel because He searches the decision making center and tests its motive (1 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

## Paul's Conduct Among Them

Paul, and those with him, had not used insincere praise to get the attention of those in Thessalonica, nor had they disguised some selfish desire for monetary gain. To verify the truthfulness of his words, the apostle called on the Thessalonians' memory of his actions and God as an all-seeing witness. Paul's first contact with Thessalonica had not been with the purpose of seeking the praise and glory of men (John 5:41, 44). He could have used the word "we" in an editorial sense, which would mean he was really referring to himself. Or, he may have been referring to Silas, Timothy and himself. They could be described as apostles because they were sent by Christ to preach the gospel. This does not have to refer to the office of an apostle. In fact, even Jesus is called an apostle because He was sent by God to present His plan for salvation and point the way



to heaven. (Hebrews 3:1). Paul further reminded them of his coming to them and the fact that he did not insist on the rights he had as an apostle of the Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1-15). Instead of demanding their support, Paul actually cared for them with the tender care of a loving mother who nurses her own children (1 Thessalonians 2:5-7).

### **They Witnessed Paul's Love and Behavior**

Paul's love for them was so intense that he was ready to pour out his very life for them in the preaching of the gospel. One who preaches the gospel with the right motives has such a love for souls that he readily shares the gospel and even his life in the hope that others can see heaven. So, the apostle was willing to participate in tiresome, hard work, or labor and toil, while he was in Thessalonica. He did this during a part of the day and even the night so that he could earn his own way and in no way be a burden to them. He did not want anything to hinder the preaching of God's good news.

They had seen how he behaved. Of course, God knew both the behavior and its motivation. Paul and his companions had lived lives dedicated to God, directed by His will and absent of any cause for blame in His sight. The brethren would be the best witnesses of this because they had seen it with their own eyes. Unbelievers would have seen their manner of life also but might not so readily admit to such good behavior since they had not yielded to the purity of the gospel.

The preachers had a special interest in the development of each individual. So, they tried to persuade, or exhorted, them to follow God's way. Additionally, they used words of encouragement and issued serious instructions, or charges, to stay in the pathway of light. The various appeals, instructions and encouragements mentioned by Paul were meant to help members of the church live godly lives. God was thereby calling them into His one kingdom and the glory He has specially reserved for it in heaven (Ephesians 4:1; Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:10). It should be noted that the call is ongoing and so is the walk, or life to be lived (1 Thessalonians 2:8-12).

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think men like Paul and Silas would endure pain and keep on boldly preaching the gospel?
2. Which motives were not evident in Paul's preaching?
3. Which motives were evident in Paul's preaching?
4. What caused Paul to act toward the Thessalonian brethren as a mother does toward her child? What type of actions might this have included?
5. What elements did Paul incorporate into his preaching at Thessalonica? How did he provide for himself?

#### Lesson 4

# Paul's Desire to See the Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

## The Brethren and The Jews--Two Responses to the Gospel

There were those unbelievers at Thessalonica who had not been receptive to the truth (Acts 17:11). This may have made Paul even more thankful for the believers. He was thankful they had received God's word and accepted it through obedient belief, thus showing they did not count it as from man but God. Once God's word has been accepted into the heart by such belief, it goes to work (1 Peter 1:23; James 1:21; John 17:17). The word's active work in them could be seen in their response to persecution.

Like God's churches in Judea which had suffered at the hands of their fleshly brethren, the Jews, the Thessalonian brethren had suffered at the hands of their countrymen. It was the unbelieving Jews who stirred up the persecution against the church, but the Greeks carried it out (1 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Acts 17:5, 13).

The Jews had put to death the Son of God and their own prophets (Acts 2:23; Matthew 23:37). They had driven Paul out of Thessalonica and persecuted him in other cities. History would show the Jews were a people who had generally failed to please God. By hindering the furtherance of the gospel, they actually opposed all men. They showed how rebellious they had become by refusing to heed God's warning and stopping others from heeding (Matthew 23:13). God waited for the Jews to repent but their sins continued to mount up until the cup of God's wrath was filled against them. Paul says "wrath had come upon them to the uttermost" out of the voice of prophecy. The destruction of Jerusalem had not yet come but Paul could speak of it as a certainty because he was God's messenger (1 Thessalonians 2:15-16).

## A Deep Desire to See Them

Paul had been forced to leave, or orphaned as his word means, the newborn Christians in Thessalonica against his personal desire, as can be seen when he says, "having been taken away from you." While he was not physically with them, his heart never left them. He had a strong desire to return to them and was working hard to that end. In fact, Paul had tried over and over again to come to them. Somehow, Satan had prevented him from coming to them personally. Opposition to anything that would further the cause of Christ is ultimately motivated by Satan (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18; Matthew 16:21-23).

Like an athlete who hoped for a victory wreath in which to rejoice, Paul saw converts to Christ as a trophy to be laid down at the Master's feet. As he looked forward to the day he would present them to Christ, becomes clear that Paul expected to recognize them in the resurrection and rejoice with them in victory (1 Thessalonians

2:19-20).

### **Paul's Concern for Their Faith**

Because he had been forced to leave Thessalonica and prevented from returning, he reached a point where his concern for the church made him decide to be left in Athens alone. Kelcy says the original for "to be left" is sometimes used to describe a loved one who has left in death. Paul would have keenly felt loneliness in a city filled with idolatry, as Athens was, so sending Timothy away was like saying goodbye to a loved one who had died (1 Thessalonians 3:1).

That sense of being alone, coupled with the descriptive terms he went on to use, help us see just how great a help Timothy was to the apostle. Timothy was a brother in God's family and a servant of, or some manuscripts say with, God. It is only in the gospel that anyone can work for or with the Father. Timothy's assignment in Thessalonica was to stabilize the brethren and encourage them in their faith. Young ones always need special attention to encourage proper growth.

Even a dog which will bite might wag his tail and cause us to drop our guard, believing he is friendly. The words "should be shaken" describe just such an occasion. Surrounded by persecutors, a Christian might have been deceived by a false teacher who appeared friendly. Paul sent Timothy to avoid such drawing away and warned them that the lot of all Christians is to suffer (1 Thessalonians 3:2-3; John 15:19; Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12).

Paul and his companions had repeatedly warned the brethren, when they were in Thessalonica, that suffering would come. As he wrote this letter to them, the persecution had come and they should not have been surprised. Neither did the apostle want them to allow some to make them believe suffering proved their religion empty or false. It is obvious Paul was concerned that they might "fall from grace" and, therefore, could not wait any longer to hear whether they had remained firm in the faith. Paul knew how the tempter had prevented him from coming to them and was concerned lest Satan would lead them away from the faith. Paul did not want his work among them to come to nought (1 Thessalonians 3:4-5; Philippians 2:12-16).

## Discussion Questions

1. Describe the way you might respond to a message from men. From God.
2. List some of the ways the Jews rebelled against God.
3. What made Paul think of the newborn Christians at Thessalonica as orphans? How did Satan's work affect them?
4. What sacrifice did Paul make out of concern for the church? Why do you think he made such a sacrifice?
5. What dangers caused Paul to be concerned about the welfare of the church?

## Lesson 5

# A Source of Comfort And A Prayer

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

### Encouragement Found In Timothy's Report

Almost as soon as Timothy arrived, Paul had begun to write. The news was good because they remained strong in faith and love. Their love for Paul had caused them to long for his coming just as he longed to be with them. They had good thoughts when they remembered him and likely his teaching as well. Such good news had partially relieved Paul at a time when he was oppressed both by physical hardships and mental stress placed upon him by dealing with great wickedness (1 Thessalonians 3:6-7).

Remember, Paul went to Berea after Thessalonica and had a good reception until the trouble making Jews from Thessalonica arrived and stirred up the crowd. He could not sit still in Athens without preaching the gospel to a city filled with idolatry. It seems only a handful obeyed in Athens. He was in Corinth, a city filled with wickedness, when Timothy and Silas rejoined him. The stress brought on by persecution and combatting the effects of idolatry and worldliness was made easier by the good news Timothy brought. During the hard times, it had seemed to Paul that life would just stop. Timothy helped him see that they had stood firm in the Lord. If they would continue to stand, Paul said he would be revitalized (1 Thessalonians 3:8).

### Paul's Desire to Thank God for Them

Paul did not feel capable of expressing the depth of his thanksgiving for the joy those young converts had brought him. Of course, he knew thanksgiving is most appropriately taken before God's throne. He informed them that he was continually asking God to allow him to see them face to face. Coffman suggests it was years before this prayer request was answered in a positive way. If so, we can certainly see why the Lord urged his disciples to always pray and not faint (Luke 18:1). Paul's desire to be with them centered on the hope that he could further instruct them so that their faith would be complete (1 Thessalonians 3:9-10).

### Paul's Prayer for the Church in Thessalonica

Paul's prayer, directed to the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, clearly shows he thought Jesus was God too. Such is emphasized by the singular verb being coupled with the plural noun, thus indicating clearly that Paul thought of the two as one. Also, he relied on their providence to bring about the answer to his prayer. Further, Paul requested of the Lord an increase in their brotherly love, as well as love for their fellow men. Agape love for those who are persecuting us and attempting to hinder us in our obedience can only come with God's help. Paul encouraged them in love by saying his love for them overflowed.

The ultimate desire of Paul's prayer was their eternal salvation. He wanted them

to be ready when Jesus came again. So, he asked God to help make their hearts such that would not be counted blameworthy. Instead, he desired that they might be counted among the holy ones when Jesus returned to the earth to reclaim His own. The entire group of holy ones may include angels as well as those saints who have died before the Lord's coming (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13).

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you suppose Paul was relieved when Timothy and Silas rejoined him?
2. What about the Thessalonians' actions do you think caused Paul to feel alive again?
3. What caused Paul to thank God? What request did that feeling cause him to make?
4. What did Paul ask God to do for the Thessalonian Christians?
5. What prayer requests do you think we should make in behalf of our brothers and sisters today?



## Lesson 6

# Encouragement In Christian Living

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

### "As to the Rest"

The use of the word "finally" in 1 Thessalonians 4:1 does not mark the end but a transition. We might say, "As to the other matters," or "As to the rest." Because of his love for them, Paul pleaded with and tried to persuade them to take certain steps. This persuasion was based upon their being in Christ and under His direction. They had been taught by Paul and the others in reference to the kind of life they should live.

One goal of that instruction was for them to please God. The A. S. V. correctly adds the words "even as ye do walk" after the words "please God." Paul then encouraged them to keep growing because the alternative is to shrink back and die. Like a military leader, Paul had given the Commander's instructions to the church (1 Thessalonians 4:2).

### God's Desire for Men to be Set Apart for His Service

The apostle expressed God's desire for every man be set apart for His service. Paul wrote from Corinth, which may explain why he mentioned fornication first. It was a sin that had been dressed up by incorporating it into idol worship. At Corinth, prostitutes served in the temple of Venus. Christians need to exercise control over their fleshly desires and avoid this sin. Paul's desire was that every Christian should know how to bring his body under control and keep it morally pure for God's service.

Sensual fulfillment was, by the idolatrous people of Paul's day, considered to be an acceptable goal. Since they did not have a close relationship with God, they gave themselves fully to the pursuit of desires brought on by leaving passion uncontrolled (Romans 1:24-27). Christians, knowing the true God of heaven, could not follow such a course. Sexual immorality defrauds the innocent. By taking advantage of them, the seducer sins against God. Further, other parties, like an innocent mate, can be hurt when one participates in such sins. Certainly, God had avenged such wrongs wrought by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (1 Thessalonians 4:3-6a; Galatians 6:7-8; Colossians 3:6).

### The Purpose of Paul's Warning

Apparently, Paul had devoted some of this teaching in Thessalonica to warning the brethren of God's avenging wrath in situations where one is defrauded. One has to wonder if the so-called social diseases and A. I. D. S. are not manifestations of such wrath. God's call, which goes forth in the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), has a two-pronged purpose. Negatively, it prohibits uncleanness. Positively, it brings the Christians to sanctification, or holiness, as Paul wrote in verse 3.

When Paul warned the Thessalonians against rejection, McGarvey said he was referring "to the forewarning and testifying of verse 6." As he went on to write, such rejection would not really be of Paul but of God, in whose behalf Paul spoke (compare Acts 5:4). The Christian who rejects God's warnings, as revealed by the inspired penman, rejects the Holy Spirit and the Father. To fail to obey God, is to reject him (1 Thessalonians 4:6b-8; 1 John 5:3).

### **An Exhortation to Brotherly Love and Work**

Anytime someone listens to one of God's messengers, it could be said that he is taught of God. The Thessalonians may have been taught by listening to Paul or by reading the writings of other inspired men (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:20-21). The love of the brethren is a central element in the teachings of Christ and His apostles. The Christians in Thessalonica had heard God's instruction and were displaying love for the brethren in all of Macedonia. Paul urged them to keep on growing in this most important characteristic.

A Christian, according to Paul, is not one striving to get ahead or make a great name for himself. Instead, he should "aspire," or "be ambitious" (A. S. V. margin), which Thayer tells us refers to "those who are not running hither and thither, but stay at home and mind their business." In other words, Paul was telling the Christians to tend to their own affairs and not pry into those of others. Also, he instructed them to be busy working with their own hands. God knew the importance of man working, so he gave Adam a job in the garden (Genesis 2:15). All of this had, seemingly, been dealt with by the apostle while he was with them. By following these instructions, Paul said the brethren would set a good example for those outside of the church. Too, they would not lack because of a failure to work. God never meant for his people to be parasites on society (1 Thessalonians 4:9-12; Colossians 4:5; Ephesians 4:28).

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What is involved in walking in a manner pleasing to God? What will a man set apart for God's service avoid?
2. Who is hurt by sexual immorality? In what sense could anyone be said to be defrauded by such?
3. Why is it important for each of us to receive the warnings contained in the word of God?
4. Why is love of the brethren so important to the church? How can such be shown?
5. Discuss the importance of work. In what sense might one be helped by working?

## Lesson 7

# The Second Coming

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

### "I Do Not Want You To Be Ignorant"

It appears some at Thessalonica thought the blessings of Christ's second coming would only be enjoyed by those who were living at the time of the Savior's return. Such a misunderstanding of one of the most basic doctrines about Jesus Christ could have led to a terrible state of spiritual depression, especially when Christian loved ones died before the Lord's return.

Paul wanted to be sure they had plenty of teaching on this important topic and were not left doubting because of ignorance (Romans 1:13; 11:25). It was critical that they understand that those who were already asleep, or those resting in the bosom of the earth in death, had not, and would not, miss the resurrection. The loss of those counted as dear loved ones is filled with shock and immediate sorrow. Unbelievers are burdened with an extra amount of sorrow when their loved ones die because they see no escape from the tomb. Paul did not want the brethren to suffer this additional sorrow (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

### Christ's Resurrection Is Proof God Can Raise the Dead

Belief in Christ's resurrection from the dead is central to the Christian's faith (1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 12-20). If Jesus had not been raised from the dead, then His claim to be the Son of God would have proven to be invalid.

Kelcy suggests that the doctrine of the resurrection must have been especially difficult for Greeks to accept (Acts 17:32). The Christian, who believes in Christ's resurrection, will believe in the resurrection of all the saints. This is true because God has shown His power over death by raising His Son. Clearly, Paul taught that those who are God's sons in the church, or family of God (compare 1 Timothy 3:15), will also be raised by the One who has power over death. In fact, the apostle was delivering the words of the Lord when he said living saints will not go before dead saints to meet the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:14-15).

### Paul's Description of the Second Coming

Paul described the Lord's second coming with quick, powerful words. He said the Lord will come down from heaven in a way that will cause all on earth to be able to see him (Revelation 1:7). As He descends, He will give a shout, which Kelcy says is a cry of command, perhaps for the dead to come forth. McGarvey suggests the archangel will then call for all of the angels to perform their various duties (Matthew 13:41-43). At about the same time, a trumpet will sound, which may serve as an announcement of the king's coming. Perhaps as a result of the cry and/or the trumpet, the dead saints will rise from the grave first. Then, the living saints will be caught up into the air with them.

All of the saints, both dead and living, will then rise to meet the Lord in the air. From that point forward, there will be no more separation of the saints from the Lord. Instead, they will be in His presence where they have so fervently wished to be (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Philipians 1:23).

### **The Second Coming Is a Message of Comfort**

Though Paul was many miles away from the young church in Thessalonica when he penned the words of this letter, he deeply desired that they know the comfort available to those who trust in Jesus Christ as Lord. Words of truth about the resurrection surely should have given, and continue to give, hope to all who are in Christ. They should give special reassurance to those whose loved ones have died in Christ. For that reason, Paul urged his readers to use the truth about the resurrection to comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

## **Discussion Questions**

1. How would someone view the death of their loved one if they did not believe in the resurrection?

2. In your own words, describe the gospel. How would the good news be changed if Jesus had not been raised from the dead?

3. What assurance should Christians find in Christ's resurrection? Why is this true?

4. Briefly relate the events Paul said will surround the second coming of Jesus.

5. What words would you use to comfort someone who had just lost a Christian loved one?

## Lesson 8

# Watching for the Day of the Lord

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

### When Will the Lord Come Again?

The questions which the Thessalonians seemingly asked about the condition of dead saints when Christ comes again might have logically led one to ask when He would come. Paul must have already dealt with this matter since he wrote as if they already knew the answer. Jesus clearly taught that His coming would be sudden and unexpected. No signs will precede that day which would point to its being at hand (Matthew 24:36-25:13; Luke 12:39-40). Just as a thief does not call ahead to announce his coming, the Lord's coming will have no special sign occurring before it and will therefore be a surprise.

Unbelievers, according to Paul, reassure themselves by saying there is no reason for concern. He explained that the second coming would be as sudden as the onset of labor pains. Those who fail to be watchful will not escape the Lord's wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

### True Believers Are Prepared

God's people do not live in the darkness of wickedness but in the light of righteousness (Colossians 1:13; 1 Peter 2:9). Christians belong to the realm of light because they are part of the Son of light (Galatians 3:26-27; Revelation 21:23). John wrote in an effort to keep Christians from participating in sin. He said, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Because they walk in the light, the day of the Lord's coming will not catch God's people unawares in the sense of being unprepared (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5).

### Encouragement to Watchfulness

Sinful people, in contrast, are part of the kingdom of darkness. Those without a hope of being raised from the dead are like a guard who sleeps on duty. Instead of being watchful and prepared, they become totally vulnerable in sleep. Christians should strive to stay awake and live a self controlled life so that they are ever ready. It is relatively easy to remain awake and watchful during the day. However, sleeping and becoming drunken were night time activities in Paul's day, just as they are now. Kelcy suggests sleep is representative of spiritual insensitivity, and drunkenness would only add to the problem. So, those who are spiritually insensitive could easily be represented in the figure of night people and activities.

Since Christians are children of the day, Paul urged them to exercise self-control and put on the Christian armor. The two most important pieces of a soldier's defensive armor in Paul's day were his helmet and breastplate. Faith and love, in Paul's view,

bond together to form the breastplate which protects the Christian's heart against the piercing darts of Satan. Faith is absolutely necessary to please God. Love must be in the heart of anyone who would have God abide within them (Hebrews 11:6; 1 John 3:16-19). Paul portrayed the hope of salvation as the helmet which protects the Christian from Satan's blows. This would seem to be the hope of heaven and the ultimate salvation to be found therein (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8).

### **Christians Should Comfort and Edify Each Other**

Paul explained why the Christian should be sure to put on the breastplate of love and faith and the helmet of the hope of salvation. He said that God did not send Jesus to die for people who would, despite His sacrifice, have to be eternally punished. Instead, He meant for Christians to work until their ultimate salvation was secured in heaven (Philippians 2:12; 3:20-21; Titus 2:13; Romans 5:9). It is important to note that Paul thought of salvation as being ultimately "through our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus' death is an effective means of salvation for all who are in Him, whether dead or alive, at the time of His coming. Jesus died that all who would yield to Him might live eternally with Him.

Because of the preceding fact, Paul urged the brethren to encourage and build up one another. Of course, Christians must avoid those things that would tear down the faith of fellow Christians, but that by itself is not enough. Paul also instructed them to find a way to build, as one would a building, brick by brick the faith of other members of the body. The apostle did hasten to add that those in Thessalonica were already doing this (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11).



## **Discussion Questions**

1. What is the nature and timing of the Lord's second coming?
2. In what sense could Christians be said to be children of light? How should this cause us to act?
3. Why should one be watchful for the Lord's return?
4. List the parts of the Christian's armor as described by Paul and explain how you think each protects us.
5. What great source of comfort did Paul tell the Thessalonians about? How could we use this to encourage and build up each other?

Lesson 9  
**Closing Exhortations**  
1 Thessalonians 5:12-27

**Proper Treatment of Leaders in the Church**

When Paul described those who labored among the Thessalonians, he used a word which Kelcy says, "indicates laborious toil. These leaders were working hard and unselfishly for the good of the church." They were also described as being over those in the Lord. Thayer says the word "over" means, "to be over, to superintend, preside over." They were doing teaching with the intent of warning, which is the meaning of "admonition." Such a description best fits the work of elders who were to oversee and tend God's flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). Paul instructed the church, or flock, to care for and recognize such men as God's ordained leaders.

Further, elders were to be given the utmost respect because of the very important task that was theirs to perform (Hebrews 13:17). Respect would naturally come from the hearts of those who loved them for keeping a watch over their souls. Also, such respect would help the church to follow God's leaders and avoid the factious kind of spirit which promotes turmoil (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

**Proper Treatment of the Unruly and Fainthearted**

Paul wanted to insure that brethren in various circumstances were watched over in the best possible way. So, he wrote special instructions which may have been intended first for the elders and then all the brethren. Some brethren could have been described as unruly. Unruly soldiers fell out of step, thus the word came to describe one who was disorderly or lazy. Such were to be given instructions which warned them of the dangers ahead and urged them to join ranks with fellow Christians in service to the Lord.

Other Christians could be described as fainthearted, or timid, fearful. This type of individual was weakened when confronted with persecution and opposition. Such need support and encouragement. Since the devil is compared to a lion, the young and weak should always be considered one of his primary targets (1 Peter 5:8). They may need an elder, or other strong Christian, to put an arm around them and help them over life's rough times. All of these groups will require a long suffering spirit to help them, if they are to survive spiritually.

In general, it could be said that Christians must not be vengeful (Romans 12:17-21). They should always try to do what is right for the other fellow, even if he is not a member of Christ's body (1 Thessalonians 5:14-15).

**Guiding Principles for the Spiritual Man**

In 1:6, Paul had noted their joy. As he closed out this letter, the apostle wanted to

urge the brethren to make joy an ever present part of their lives. This is possible, despite outward difficulties, because of an awareness of God's love. Christians remember that He sent His Son to die for all those who would obediently hear His voice. Further, they know freedom from sin and fellowship with the Father and Son in Christ's body.

Just as eating is a regular practice used to sustain the body, prayer should regularly be used to sustain the soul. The Christian's blessings should cause him to continually give thanks to God. The same things that allow one to be constantly joyful, should make him constantly thankful. Also, it is God that sustains the Christian in this life and gives the many good gifts each possesses (Acts 17:28; James 1:17). It is God's will that His children should be joyful, prayerful and thankful, in his Son, the Savior.

McGarvey says, "as fire may be smothered out by overwhelming it with noncombustible matter, so the Spirit of God in the breast of a man may be quenched by overloading the life with worldly cares." Paul urged his readers to avoid such overwhelming worldly cares. A prophet is one who speaks for God, thus he is inspired. To despise true prophesying would be to despise God's very revelation. So, God's people could not afford to despise prophecies. The apostle did hasten to say Christians need to test the things they hear and see and only cling to that which is good, or from God (1 John 4:1; Deuteronomy 18:21-22).

Therefore, the Lord's followers are to avoid all things that bear the likeness of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22). Lipscomb referred to a corresponding verse in Romans 14:16. He wrote, "Do not do good in such a way as to make people think you rendered evil purposes.....Some people do many good things in such a way that others think they are actuated by evil motives and sinister designs."

### **Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonians and a Request**

Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians as he closed this letter was that God would continue setting them apart, or sanctifying, until they were complete. Further, he prayed the whole spirit, or man, which we might call mind, soul and body, would be kept safe by no sin being laid to his charge until Jesus comes again. God first called all Christians through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). He continues to call to righteousness through His word. The Almighty is able to set His followers apart and keep marks of blame off their records. He is faithful in that He will keep all of His promises and do His part. Anyone who would receive His promised blessings must fulfill the conditions He has stated (1 John 1:9; 2:24; Jude 21,24).

The apostle went on to make a request of his children in the faith in Thessalonica. How appropriate that any proclaimer of God's truth should ask for prayers in his behalf. Paul believed in prayer and constantly remembered others in his prayers, so he asked them to be mindful of him (1 Thessalonians 5:23-25).

### **Concluding Remarks**

The kiss, like our handshake, was their way of greeting a friend. Paul did not

discourage its use but did urge that it be practiced with a proper attitude, that is one of holiness instead of lustfulness.

Paul obviously saw the reading of this letter to all Christians as imperative. As Kelcy says, the word "charge," or adjure as in some translations, "means 'to cause to swear by.' Paul is in substance saying that he is putting the Thessalonian brethren under oath." He wanted all to receive the comforts and instructions contained in this letter. We should always stress the importance of access to the Bible. No one man, or group of men, should be allowed to make the scriptures their private domain to the exclusion of others.

Paul's final prayer for them was that God's favor would be upon them.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What images come to mind when you think of elders in the Lord's church as shepherds? How does Paul say they should be treated?
2. Briefly describe the "unruly." The "fainthearted." What treatment are each of them to be given?
3. List and briefly explain the guiding principles Paul gave for the spiritual man.
4. What did Paul ask God to do for the Thessalonians? What did he ask the Thessalonians to do for him?
5. How could we stress the importance of each Christian receiving the comfort and instructions of scripture?

## Lesson 10

# Comfort In Their Affliction

## 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

### Introducing the Second Letter to Thessalonica

The first letter to the Thessalonians dealt with the problem of the dead in Christ. After it was received, it seems some insisted the Lord's return, as described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, was imminent. They may even have claimed that they were inspired and used a letter they claimed was from Paul, which must have been forged, to back up their false teachings (2:2). It appears that his second letter was written soon after the first. Silas and Timothy are once again listed as Paul's companions and conditions in the church are very much the same. Therefore, the letter must have been written between A. D. 50 and 54.

As in the first letter, Paul saw no need to mention his apostleship as he introduced himself, so it can be assumed no one had challenged it in this city. Silas and Timothy were also well known among these brethren. The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23), thus Paul described it as being in both the Father and the Son. Jesus is the supreme ruler, the one who takes away our sins, and God's anointed. Paul's desire for the church is that they continue to receive God's unmerited favor and have the special inner peace such brings (2 Thessalonians 1:1-2).

### Paul's Thankfulness for the Church in Thessalonica

Paul felt compelled to thank God because his prayer for the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 3:10-13) had been answered. Their faith had been lacking at the time of the first letter but, by the time this second letter was written, Paul was able to say it was growing immeasurably. Their love for each other was also growing.

Paul, Silas and Timothy, along with God's churches in other places, rejoiced because they had been longsuffering in their faith during a period of ongoing persecution (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14). They did not give up, though in the midst of severe mental and physical suffering for their faith (2 Thessalonians 1:3-4).

### God's Coming Judgment

The very fact that they were able to endure such hardships was a clear indication that God was with them. It also foreshadowed a day when God would judge all and punish those who had caused His children to suffer. Of course, Christians should be thankful for the maturity which arises out of suffering and the fact that it better prepares them for heaven (Romans 5:3-4). In judgment, God's righteousness, or justice, will be revealed to those who may even have doubted his existence (Romans 2:5). While God can use the works of evil men to strengthen his people, He will punish those who worked them (2 Thessalonians 1:5-6).

Even though the Thessalonian brethren were being afflicted at the time of his writing, Paul here assured them relief was coming. That relief would come in the form of the Lord's second coming. Paul said angels would be with Jesus, as they often were at important times during His stay on earth (Luke 2:8-14; Matthew 4:11; 28:1-8; Acts 1:9-11). They would do the Lord's bidding in the great harvest of souls (2 Thessalonians 1:7; Matthew 13:33-43).

## **Punishment**

The apostle said Jesus would come in flaming fire and take "vengeance," which is from the same root as "righteous" in verses 5 and 6. The punishment for wrongs committed against God and man in the final judgment will be just, or righteous, because it will be based on the deeds wrought on earth (Galatians 6:7-8; Romans 12:19-21; Hebrews 10:28-31). Such punishment will belong to two groups. First, those who do not recognize God as the one true and living God of all (Romans 1:18-32; Ephesians 4:17-19). This group may include those who intellectually know God is but do not acknowledge it in their deeds (James 2:19). It certainly would include Jews who would not yield to the Father's will (John 8:54-55). Second, those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord. This group would, of course, include those who have not repented of their sins, confessed Jesus as God's Son and put him on in baptism (Luke 13:1-5; Acts 17:30; Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Also in this group would be those who do not keep on obeying the gospel (2 Peter 1:4-11; Hebrews 3:8-13).

The rewards for the righteous and the wicked will last forever (Matthew 25:46). Thomas says, "The original term for 'destruction' (*olethros*) literally means ruin or death; and since death always involves a *separation*, the implication is that the sinner will be forever separated from God, who is the source of all life." The two classes of people described in verse 8 will be vanished from the Lord's presence, power and glory for all of the ages to come, or eternity.

The banishment will come in the day of the Lord's second coming. Kelcy says the original "has 'whenever' with the aorist subjunctive, a construction indicating the certainty of the event and yet the uncertainty of the time of it." He will have two purposes at that time. First, Christ's glory will be seen in all of His set apart children. Second, all of those obedient believers will marvel, or be in awe, of the Lord at his coming. Remember, He will not come again as a man to be a perfect sacrifice for sins but as a king who has conquered His enemies (1 Corinthians 15:23-28; Revelation 1:12-18). Paul wrote all of this because his testimony was believed by the Thessalonian brethren who would be a part of those showing forth Christ's glory and awed in His presence (2 Thessalonians 1:8-10).

## **Paul's Prayer During Their Affliction**

Paul wanted them to be prepared for the kingdom of God when Christ would come again for judgment. So, he, along with Silas and Timothy, prayed for them that they would be considered by God ready to enter heaven (Matthew 25:14-30). Christians must strive to live a righteous life and perform all of the works one who truly believes in

God and His Son. Notice, to truly do this requires God's help, which Paul prayed for in their behalf. Also, if there were no concern about falling from grace, Paul's prayer would be meaningless.

When Christians live according to the Lord's will, His name is glorified (Matthew 5:16). In turn, wearing the name of God's own Son and being a part of His body will bring glory to the Christian. This is only possible because of the unmerited gift of God's help (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12).



## **Discussion Questions**

1. What in the church at Thessalonica caused Paul to thank God? Why did he, Silas, Timothy and other Christians rejoice?
  
2. What things can you hear which make you rejoice about a church?
  
3. What about suffering persecution could lead one to rejoice?
  
4. What types of people did Paul say would be punished when the Lord comes?
  
5. What two purposes will Jesus fulfill when He comes to reclaim His own?
  
6. What can be learned from Paul's concern and prayer for the Thessalonian's to be prepared when the Lord returns?

## Lesson 11

# Events Prior to the Second Coming

## 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

### At Peace With the Lord's Second Coming

Paul begged the brethren on the basis of the Lord's second coming and the gathering together to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). He did not want them to lose their spiritual balance because of some false prophet who claimed to be speaking by the power of a spirit, or a false teacher claiming to present God's word, or a letter some said was from Paul (1 John 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3-5). He did not want their minds to be so disturbed that they acted rashly. It seems someone was saying the Lord's coming would happen in the very near future. Naturally, such a thought would cause one to reconsider, even lay aside, some immediate plans.

Paul assured them that the Lord's second coming could not occur until some went away from the truth and took their stand somewhere else. Also, the son of perdition, or perishing who is also called the man of sin, would have to be made known. It is interesting to note that Judas was called the son of perdition (John 17:12). While he was not Satan, certainly he allowed himself to be made his agent by yielding control of his heart to him (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3; John 13:21-30).

### Characteristics of the Man of Sin

Paul said the man of sin is continually opposed to anyone other than himself being lifted up in man's eyes or worshipped. So jealous is he of anyone, or thing, being worshipped above him that he actually makes himself sit on the seat that belongs to God in the temple. Paul thought of the church as the temple under the new covenant (Ephesians 2:21; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17). The man of sin usurps God's place in the church and sets himself up as God.

McGarvey says, "The Greek word for 'worship' is *sebasma*; from it came *Selastus* or Augustus (i.e., the Worshipful), which was the title of the Roman emperors." He went on to say, "A man of that age could hardly see this word in such a connection without thinking that Paul meant to convey the idea that the anti-Christ would arrogate to himself all the reverence then claimed by the great civil lords of the earth, such as emperors, kings, etc." Thus, we see a man, group of men or type of man, who would set himself up at the head of the church as one worthy of worship, thereby leading all who would follow him into apostasy.

Warnings of a falling away are found repeatedly in the New Testament (Acts 20:29-31; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-8; 4:3-5; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 3:1-7). Paul warned the Thessalonians in person, as well as in this letter, concerning the dangers of such a falling away. He said God was restraining the man of sin until a time that fit His timetable. He may have done that through the repeated warnings of the apostles and strong elders who constantly went to the Word for their authority. Certainly, when men cease to look

within God's word for solutions to spiritual problems they are ripe for the reception of an outside authority (2 Thessalonians 2:4-6).

### **The Coming and Power of the Lawless One**

The lawless spirit was probably called a mystery because it was not practiced in the open in its early stages. The "he" who prevented lawlessness from spreading at the time of Paul's writing may have been Christ. Certainly, we know he has the power to restrain the devil (Revelation 20:1-3). Paul explained that once God allowed the restraints to be released, the spirit of lawlessness would come out of hiding. That spirit would be particularly embodied in one man. The defeat of lawlessness would come about initially through the preaching of God's word and ultimately through the coming of our Lord in the last day.

Paul stated that just as the Lord will have a coming, the wicked, or lawless, one, would come. Christ worked by the power of God, but the apostle foresaw the wicked one working by Satan's power. He also said the wicked one would have signs and wonders, just as Jesus did, but they would be deceitful instead of true like those Jesus worked (2 Thessalonians 2:7-9).

### **The Power of the Lawless One Over the Lost**

Paul foresaw that the lawless one would especially deceive those who were already in a perishing condition because they did not love God's will enough to obey it (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). Those who refused to do as God directed could only look forward to His wrath (Romans 2:8; 1:18). This was especially true because they would do evil against God's law by living in a manner totally opposed to God. Paul said He would deceive those unbelievers lest they should see the truth and be saved (Matthew 13:13-15).

Some would rather hear a lie than the truth. God tests man's desires by allowing lies to be presented as well as truth. One can know what he hears is true when it is from God's word (Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 1 Peter 4:11). Those who will perish delight in acts that are repulsive to God. Because of their attitude, God will permit them to find opportunity to show their true allegiance (Isaiah 66:3-4). Those who love ways contrary to God's will certainly would not love the truth. In its place, they would readily accept some lie that was more palatable to them. Because of such acceptance of error, Paul said they would be eternally condemned (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What types of things might cause one to lose his spiritual balance?
2. Describe the man of sin, or son of perdition.
3. What actions and attitudes might contribute to a falling away?
4. What means would the lawless one use to deceive Christians?
5. How can we avoid being susceptible to the power of the lawless one?

## Lesson 12

# A Prayer and a Request for Prayer

2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

### Thanksgiving for God's Chosen

In contrast to the tragic condition of those who rejoiced in wicked ways, Paul was able to give thanks for the saints. They were the Lord's beloved as is shown by His choosing them for salvation. Since Jesus came to save the lost, and God desires all men to be saved (Luke 19:10; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:3-4), we might say God intends for all to be a part of the chosen. Unfortunately, not all will receive His calling or choosing. It comes through the setting apart of, or by, the Spirit and an actively demonstrated belief of the truth.

God's word is the means of sanctification and is called the "sword of the Spirit" by Paul (John 17:17; Ephesians 6:17). We conclude that obedience to the commands contained in the book delivered by the Spirit's power is the way of accepting God's call and receiving the longed for setting apart by God. Some would say we are randomly elected unto salvation. Paul says those who receive the gospel call will get to share in Christ's glory at His coming (Hebrews 5:8-9). So, obedience to the gospel yields a final, glorious, setting apart (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

### Paul's Exhortation and Prayer for Thessalonica

Paul wanted them to hold their ground (in contrast to verse 2) by keeping the truths given over to them through inspired speakers and writers. God's children need to hold on to inspired words that have been handed down to them but not the doctrines of men that have been taught or practiced from generation to generation (Matthew 15:1-9; Colossians 2:8).

Paul's desire was that the Lord, Savior and King of all believers, with his Father, who loved the lost (John 3:16), would encourage and strengthen them in righteous words and works. It should be noted that the Father and Son are considered to be the common source of these things, thus acknowledging their equality. Christians have the eternal comfort of heaven before them because of the unmerited favor they bestowed (2 Thessalonians 2:15-17).

### Paul's Request For Their Prayers

As he did in his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul used the word "finally" meaning, "as for the rest." Paul asked them to pray for him but with the desire that others be benefitted. He asked that prayers continually be offered requesting that the gospel be spread to all men. As it was spread, Paul also wanted them to pray that it would triumph, or meet with success, with those men as it had in the lives of the Thessalonian brethren.

Shepherd believes Paul was at Corinth as he wrote this letter and the vision he had from the Lord there and Gallio's quick response may have been a direct answer to brethren's prayers that he be delivered (Acts 18:7-17). No matter whether such was the case or not, it clearly is an example of the way God can help by working through men even in a non-miraculous way. Coffman quotes Adam Clarke and George Howard to prove the word "faith" here is our word "trustworthiness", or "fidelity". This can apply to those claiming to be God's people as well as those outside of God's children (Romans 9:6). Paul's desire was that these men who lacked trustworthiness be stopped so that the gospel could be furthered (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2).

### **Paul's Confidence in the Thessalonians**

In contrast to some men who could not be trusted, Paul said God is completely trustworthy. Those placing their trust in God will be made firm by Him so that they will not fall prey to Satan or his devices. Paul was confident that the Christians in Thessalonica were obeying the Lord's commandments and would keep on obeying if they relied upon Christ to be their strengthening force (Philippians 4:13). Notice that Paul's confidence in the brethren stemmed from his confidence in the Lord.

Paul's prayer was that the Lord would lead them into the love of God which would naturally lead to obedience (1 John 5:3) Also, he asked that they be given the same ability to endure trials that Christ had shown while on earth (2 Thessalonians 3:3-5).

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Are Christians loved by Jesus? What evidence causes you to answer as you did?
2. By what means are Christians set apart? How is such accomplished?
3. What truths did Paul mention which should encourage Christians to hold their ground against the attacks of the devil?
4. What did Paul ask the Thessalonians to pray for in his behalf?
5. If one counts God as trustworthy, what blessings will be his? How will he respond to the Lord's commands?

### Lesson 13

# Disciplining the Disorderly and Encouraging the Faithful

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

## Discipline for the Disorderly

Paul wrote this letter with the authority that belonged to an apostle of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:1; 11-12; Matthew 16:19). In fact, he carefully noted that he spoke by Christ's authority. The Lord's command as issued by Paul was that they not have fellowship with those who he was about to mention. This does not forbid all contact, as we shall see later, but the social contact that would make it appear that one saw nothing wrong with the actions of such brethren (compare Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13).

In the first Thessalonian letter, Paul had commanded the brethren to work with their own hands (4:11-12). Those who refused to follow that command, or any other oral instruction passed on to them by God's spokesmen, were not walking according to rule and, according to Paul, should be withdrawn from. Remember, unruly soldiers fall out of step thus becoming disorderly or lazy (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Paul had already urged such brethren to join ranks with the other members lest they run into many dangers (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

## Paul's Example Among Them

Paul urged them to remember the example he had set when in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:9). He had worked night and day so that they might hear the gospel and he could earn a living. If one who was bringing them the word of salvation could work with his own hands and not insist on being fed, clothed and housed by the brethren, surely the unruly brother could too.

He did not eat anyone's bread without compensating them for it. In other words, he did not take his living from them. McGarvey says the vast amount of slave labor in that day made working with one's hands be despised. Paul tried to make Christians realize that work was honorable (Genesis 2:15; 3:17-19; 1 Corinthians 4:12; Ephesians 4:28). As one who preached the gospel, Paul had a right to earn a living from that preaching (1 Corinthians 9:1-14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17-18). Paul did not take advantage of that right because he wanted them to see that work was honorable. He wanted them to follow his example (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).

## The Command for the Disorderly

Kelcy notes that Paul used the imperfect tense when he said, "we commanded you this", so it means he repeatedly commanded them. Thus, the one who as a habit refused to earn a living was to be refused aid by his brethren. Unfortunately, these same folks,



while refusing to do much of anything themselves, were constantly busy telling others what to do. McGarvey says Paul's words could be translated, "who have no business, and yet are busy with everybody's business." From this it can be seen that no one remains truly idle. If one is not busy building up the Lord's work and providing for his own family, he will be busy doing things which will tear them both down (2 Thessalonians 3:10-11; compare 1 Timothy 5:11-15; Matthew 12:30).

Paul spoke with authority, as is shown by his use of the word "command." However, he also spoke in love, with a desire to encourage the brethren in the right direction, as is shown by his use of the word "exhort." He plainly told the disorderly that they needed to go back to work, earn their living and cease being in charge of everyone else's business (2 Thessalonians 3:12).

### **Encouragement for the Faithful**

Despite the fact that some had been lazy, Paul encouraged Christians to continue in all good works which were in accord with God's will. As Lipscomb says, "Nothing discourages giving to the needy like having the lazy and meddlesome seeking support." Those who are truly in need will still require help (2 Thessalonians 3:13; Galatians 6:10).

The actions commanded in 2 Thessalonians 3:14 were not rash but came at the end of a carefully prepared strategy. All possible courses of action to restore the unruly to proper fellowship with the Lord would have been tried and, unfortunately, failed. Paul taught them when he was in Thessalonica (3:10), taught them in the previous letter (1 Thessalonians 4:11), sent Timothy to teach them (1 Thessalonians 3:2,6), and taught them in this second epistle (3:6-12). If anyone continued to refuse to walk according to God's order after so much instruction, he would have needed swift and effective discipline. His fellow Christians were instructed to refuse him associations, in a social sense, in an effort to make him ashamed of his actions and move him to repentance.

The faithful brethren were not to hate or act in a hostile manner toward such disorderly ones. Instead, they were to issue a warning based upon instruction that would exhibit the love of one brother for another. To follow Paul's instructions, it would not be necessary to break off all contact, just social association (2 Thessalonians 3:15).

### **Closing Thoughts**

Despite the stern warnings he had used, Paul still desired that the Lord of peace would give them peaceful relations between one another and with God. The Lord is constantly associated with peace, so Paul's prayer was that He be with them (Luke 2:14; John 14:27; Ephesians 2:12-17).

Some have suggested that someone had tried to make a letter appear like it was from Paul. Certainly, he wanted them to know this letter was from him. It seems he dictated most of his letters to a scribe and then wrote some of the closing remarks with his own hand, thus clearly identifying a letter as from Paul. His final words are identical to those in the first letter except for the use of "all". After such strong warnings, Paul

may have wanted to reassure the guilty that he still desired God's unmerited favor for them (2 Thessalonians 3:16-18).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What types of actions, on the part of a Christian, might be considered disorderly?
2. How had Paul demonstrated the honorable nature of work?
3. Why do you think Paul gave such stern instructions regarding those who would not work?
4. What instructions did Paul have for the faithful?
5. After reading Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians, write a prayer for your brethren.

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