



THE BOOK OF 2 THESSALONIANS



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INTRODUCTION

Thessalonians are wonderful letters to Christians to remind them and us that the Lord will return one day as He promised when He ascended into heaven, **Acts 1:9-11**. With this promise in mind, this should encourage us and motivate all Christians to live holy and godly lives until the Day of His return.

The Thessalonian epistles are unique in many aspects. The letters are inspired by God and are, therefore, ‘the word of the Lord,’ **1 Thessalonians 4:15**. They are among the earliest, if not the earliest, of the New Testament epistles written by Paul.

The emphasis in the letters is profound: Christ is coming! The ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven is recorded in Acts chapter one. Upon this momentous occasion, an announcement was made: Christ is coming again!

THESSALONICA, THE PLACE AND PEOPLE

Paul, with Silas and Timothy, came to Thessalonica from Philippi on his second missionary journey, stopping in Amphipolis and Apollonia before arriving at Thessalonica, **Acts 17**. He preached in the city’s synagogue, the chief synagogue of the region, for at least three weeks.

His ministry was strong, and he established a Jewish-Gentile church, although it was more heavily Gentile, **1 Thessalonians 1:9**. When Paul faced great persecution at the hands of the mob, he fled to Berea, but the Thessalonians eventually forced him to leave there also, **Acts 17:13-14**.

The city of Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia, located on the Ignatian Way, which was a major road from Rome to the eastern provinces. The city was named after the wife of Cassander, who built the city. Those in Thessalonica adored many gods, particularly Jupiter, as the father of Hercules, the alleged founder of its ancient royal family.

The city also boasted a celebrated amphitheatre, where gladiatorial shows were exhibited for the amusement of the citizens, and a circus for public games. Thessalonica’s location and use as a port made it a prominent city. In 168 B.C., it became the capital of the second district of Macedonia, and later it was made the capital and major port of the whole Roman province of Macedonia (146 B.C.).

In 42 B.C., after the battle at Philippi, Thessalonica was made a free city. Thessalonica was the capital of one of the four Roman districts of Macedonia. The church of the Thessalonians was established, **Acts 17:1-9**, on Paul’s second journey, where he and his fellow workers had just left Philippi.

Travelling through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they arrived at Thessalonica, where Paul immediately located the synagogue and used their Sabbath gathering as an opportunity for evangelism.

For three weeks, he reasoned with the Jews, converting some and several prominent Gentiles, but some unbelieving Jews soon caused a disturbance, forcing him to leave. But despite all threats by God’s grace, a good, strong congregation was planted and established.

The church quickly gained a good reputation, **1 Thessalonians 1:8**, and was made up mostly of Gentiles, **1 Thessalonians 1:9**. Some of its members included Jason, **Acts 17:9**, Aristarchus, and Secundus, **Acts 20:4**.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Very little has been uncovered at ancient Thessalonica because Thessaloniki sits atop the remains. Excavators found a bathhouse and mint dating to the 1st century A.D. below pavement surrounding an odeum.

An inscription (30 B.C. to 143 A.D.) from the Vardar gate bears the word *politarches*, the word Luke used in reference to the officials of the city before whom Jason was brought by the mob, **Acts 17:6**. The word does not appear in any other Greek literature but does match the archaeology of the site.

The Politarch Inscription can be viewed in the British Museum in London. Discovered in 1835, this is a Greek inscription from a Roman gateway in Thessalonica. It lists officials of the town in the 2nd century A.D., beginning with six Politarchs.

In **Acts 17:6-8**, the author, Luke, refers to the “politarchs,” translated in the ESV as the “city authorities” of Thessalonica. Acts records Paul and Silas in Thessalonica being brought before the *politarchas*, ‘rulers of the city’, accused of being troublemakers.

THE AUTHORS

There is no doubt as to the authors of the letters. “From Paul, Silas, and Timothy...” **1 Thessalonians 1:1 / 2 Thessalonians 1:1**. Both letters are from Paul, Silas (also known as Silvanus) and Timothy. Of these three, the apostle Paul was the main author. We do not know how much of the letter Silas and Timothy wrote, but all three of them were in agreement with what the letter contained.

Paul, who was formally known as Saul of Tarsus, was a ‘persecutor of the church’, **Acts 9:1-2** and became to be known as the ‘apostle to the Gentiles’, **Acts 9:15**. He was an educated man who is credited as being the author of half the New Testament books.

Silvanus, also known as Silas, was originally a messenger from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, **Acts 15:22 / Acts 15:27**. He was recognised as a prophet who encouraged the brethren in Antioch, **Acts 15:32**.

He stayed in Antioch until he became Paul’s travelling companion, **Acts 15:34 / Acts 15:40-41**. He suffered with the apostle Paul whilst they were in prison in Philippi, **Acts 16:19-25**, and together with Paul established the church in Thessalonica, **Acts 17:1-4**.

Timothy, also known as Timotheus, was a young disciple who travelled with Paul, **Acts 16:1-3**, and is mentioned in many of Paul’s letters. He received two letters from Paul, **1 Timothy 1:1 / 2 Timothy 1:1**. Just like Paul and Silas, he suffered being in prison, **Hebrews 13:23**. He has just returned from a trip to Thessalonica himself, **1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 / 1 Thessalonians 3:6**.

Both Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy (at least by inference) appear in the records of Acts as Paul’s companions during his first visit to Thessalonica, **Acts 17:1-9**. For a short time after Paul departed from Thessalonica, the three were separated, but they were reunited in Corinth, **Acts 18:5 / 2 Corinthians 1:19**. Corinth thus suggests itself as the place from which the letters to the Thessalonians church were sent.

Since Paul, Silvanus and Timothy are named together as joint authors of the letters, it is, at first sight, conceivable that Silvanus and Timothy played a responsible part along with Paul in the composition.

Timothy indeed was Paul’s personal assistant and is named along with Paul in the precept of some other letters, **2 Corinthians**, **Philippians**, **Colossians**, **Philemon**, certainly because he was in Paul’s company when these were written and possibly because he served Paul as amanuensis.

Silvanus, on the other hand, occupied a more independent status in relation to Paul. He was not a convert of Paul's (as Timothy was); he was a member of the church of Jerusalem, enjoying the confidence of the leaders of that church, being himself one of the "leading men among the brethren" there, Acts 15:22.

The a priori likelihood that such a man would be the joint author of the letters in which he is named as one of the senders, in a substantial and not a merely nominal sense, is borne out by internal evidence.

When Paul, in other letters, expresses his thanks to God for those to whom he writes, he usually does so in the first person singular "I give thanks ..." even when others are associated with him in the prescript, 1 Corinthians 1:4 / Philippians 1:3 / Philemon 4.

Colossians, sent in the name of himself and Timothy to a church not personally known to him, is an exception. Colossians 1:3 begins, We always thank God..." in both the Thessalonian letters, the first-person plural is used: "We give thanks to God always ..." 1 Thessalonians 1:2. "We are bound to give thanks to God always..." 2 Thessalonians 1:3.

The use of the first-person plural is maintained throughout both letters, apart from certain places where the singular suddenly appears, 1 Thessalonians 2:18 / 1 Thessalonians 3:5 / 1 Thessalonians 5:27 / 2 Thessalonians 2:5 / 2 Thessalonians 3:17. In two of these five places, the first personal pronoun is accompanied by the name "Paul", 1 Thessalonians 2:18 / 2 Thessalonians 3:17.

All of them are best explained by the supposition that they are Paul's personal additions, whether inserted by him orally as the letters were being dictated or appended, possibly in his own hand, when they were being read over after completion.

The inclusion of his name in the prescripts and especially his signature at the end of the second letter would provide evidence enough that the contents as a whole were approved by him, whoever was responsible for the actual composition. (F. F. Bruce Word Biblical Commentary Volume 45 1&2 Thessalonians)

THE AUTHENTICITY OF 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians claims to be from Paul, 1 Thessalonians 1:1 / 1 Thessalonians 2:18, and is Pauline both in language and in ideas. The author's associates, Silas and Timothy, whom we know from Acts, were with Paul on his second missionary journey. The letter must be early for various reasons. The church organisation is apparently in a very early stage.

It is difficult to think of anyone writing after Paul's death putting forth in Paul's name a statement that might be understood as meaning that the Parousia (second coming of Christ) would take place during the Apostle's lifetime, 1 Thessalonians 4:15.

The question of the fate of believers who died before the Parousia must have been answered fairly early in the church's life. Yet it is impossible to think of anyone but Paul putting it out in early times.

How could it possibly gain a circulation while the Apostle was still engaged in vigorous work, travelling among the churches and well able to denounce it? (Yet we must bear in mind that the possibility of forgery seems to be implied by 2 Thessalonians 2:2, and the explanation of the autograph in 2 Thessalonians 3:17.)

Moreover, the letter is as well attested as we could reasonably ask. It is not the kind of letter which would be quoted often. This explains its absence from the sub-apostolic writings that have come down to us (though there are some similarities in language which may be more than coincidence).

But it was accepted as sacred Scripture by Marcion (c. 140 A.D.), and it is included among the canonical books in the list given in the Muratorian Fragment (a list of the books accepted as canonical some time after the middle of the second century, probably at Rome). The Epistle is definitely quoted by Irenaeus (c. 180 A.D.) and later writers.

It hardly seems the kind of letter which would be forged. Why should anyone produce a letter like this? What did he aim to do thereby? The letter reads naturally as the reaction of Paul to the situation we outlined earlier. But it seems completely out of character as a forgery foisted on the church to serve some devious purpose of the forger.

Nothing very considerable can be set over against all this. Some of the Tübingen school regarded the Epistle as unauthentic, but they stand practically alone. Their reasons for rejecting the Epistle fail to commend themselves.

Thus, we find the objection that it is not doctrinal enough, or again, that it shows too close dependence on 1 and 2 Corinthians. These two surely cancel each other out, for the former means it is not Pauline enough, and the latter that it is too Pauline! Neither carries conviction nor do others that are alleged.

No more convincing is the suggestion that the letter cannot be an authentic writing of the Apostle because there is a series of discrepancies between it and Acts. For example, 1 Thessalonians 2:7-11 gives us a picture of Paul working at his trade, and this is said to be incompatible with the statement of Acts 17:2 that he preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica on three Sabbaths.

We have already considered the circumstances of the first preaching in the city, and we have seen no necessary contradiction. Paul may have stayed in Thessalonica no longer than that Acts indicates. Or, if we feel that a longer period is required, Acts may give us the length of his synagogue preaching.

It is the same with the allegation that the two contradict each other since Acts 17:4, speaks of the converts as both Jews and Gentiles, while 1 Thessalonians 1:9 / 1 Thessalonians 2:14, refers to Gentiles only. Or that Acts 18:5 speaks of Silas and Timothy as coming to Paul at Corinth, whereas 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4 shows that Timothy was with Paul for a time in Athens.

As B. Clogg says, "Discrepancies of this nature prove little except that the authors of Acts and of 1 Thessalonians wrote independently of each other." Neither is giving the complete story, and we must make use of both.

But to say that both must in all points tell all they know is so obviously false as to need no refutation. We conclude, then, that there is no real reason for doubting the authenticity of this epistle. (The new international commentary on the New Testament. The first and second epistles to the Thessalonians. Leon Morris).

THE AUTHENTICITY

As is the case with the First Epistle, there are good reasons for thinking of 2 Thessalonians as authentic. It has early attestations, for Polycarp, Ignatius, and Justin all seem to have known it, possibly also the writer of Didache. It is found in the Marcionite canon and in the Muratorian Fragment, and it is quoted by name by Irenaeus and later writers.

As with 1 Thessalonians, the mention of Silvanus and Timothy as associates of the author and the obviously early date of the writing favour Pauline authorship. 2 Thessalonians emerged into church history associated unequivocally with 1 Thessalonians. It claims to have been written by Paul, and the language and theology are Pauline.

It is difficult to think of a suitable motive for a forger (notice that, since 2 Thessalonians 3:17 claims to be Paul's signature, forgery is the only alternative to authenticity. We cannot think of someone putting out in good faith a sample of Pauline teaching).

It is difficult to think of a reason for making the letter resemble 1 Thessalonians so closely. It is difficult to think of a forger entering so fully into the mind of Paul as to produce a writing so redolent of the Apostle as this one.

There is also the point that had he not written 1 Thessalonians, we would hardly call in question the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians. It is rather strange to call into question an Epistle that has all the hallmarks of a genuine Pauline writing on the grounds that it is similar to another Pauline writing.

For reasons such as these, most scholars have not hesitated to accept this writing. In recent times, however, attention has been focused on certain matters which raise doubts. While not many would go so far as to pronounce the Epistle non-Pauline, several scholars feel perplexed. The principal points are the following.

1. There is what Neil speaks of: "The problem of the letter is one of accounting for the similarity to and difference from a letter written by the same hand, to the same people, only a short while before."

Sometimes 2 Thessalonians repeats 1 Thessalonians not only in general ideas but also in the actual words that are employed. The objection is that such an outstanding man as Paul would not find it necessary to repeat himself. He would, if he had to say the same thing, say it in different words so that deliberate imitation is the explanation.

At the same time, there are differences such as those on eschatology (The branch of theology that is concerned with the end of the world or of humankind), which we shall notice in the next section. The thought then is that the ideas are not the ideas of Paul, and they are expressed in language which is a deliberate imitation of that of the great Apostle.

In the first place, it must be re-joined to this that the general similarity to Pauline style is very close indeed. It is very difficult to envisage a forger who could imitate Paul's language so very closely. Pauline words, phrases and constructions are everywhere. So are Pauline ideas.

If Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians not so very long after 1 Thessalonians, it would not be surprising if sometimes words and phrases were repeated, especially if, as Neil thinks possible, he read through "the customary draft copy of his first letter before writing the second." This would be the more likely in that he had to bear in mind what was written in 1 Thessalonians because some of it had been misunderstood.

It must also be borne in mind that the extent of the resemblance is easy to exaggerate. It is natural for there to be close resemblances in such places as the opening and the close, and indeed, in the general structure of the letters. It is natural also for an author to come close to repeating himself when he is writing on the same subjects twice within a matter of weeks or even months.

But the suggested parallels do not cover more than about one-third, which is strange in a deliberate imitation. And even so, more or less identical language is used in different ways.

For example, there are marked resemblances between how Paul describes his hard manual labour in the two letters. But in the first, he does it to show love for his converts, while in the second, it is to bring out the force of his example. This kind of thing is more likely to be slavishly imitated by a forger.

There is, moreover, the point that the resemblances are to 1 Thessalonians. Why should a later imitator confine himself to this Epistle and make use of Paul's major writings? The differences are no longer conclusive.

Thus, Paul's comments on the Man of Sin (or Lawlessness) in the second letter are different from anything he has to say in the first. But the difference does not amount to incompatibility. It is no more than a man might add as a supplement to what he has already said on the subject. It is the same with the other differences that are brought forward.

This combination of likeness and difference is interesting, and there may be more to it than at present appears. But the point is that it does not prove the difference in authorship. Such a man as Paul was quite capable of both.

2. The eschatology of 2 Thessalonians is said to be different from that of 1 Thessalonians.

The simplest way of putting this is to say that in the First Epistle, the coming of the Lord is thought of as about to take place very soon and very suddenly. But in the Second Epistle, it will be preceded by signs, like a great rebellion and the appearance of the Man of Lawlessness.

But to state this hypothesis is virtually to refute it, for it is a commonplace in apocalyptic literature that the Lord's coming is to be sudden, and yet that it will be preceded by signs. We find this in the Gospels and in Revelation, to name no other. It should also not be overlooked that Paul's warning in 1 Thessalonians 5 not to be unprepared when the day comes may well imply a knowledge of premonitory signs.

A similar objection is that the people to whom 2 Thessalonians was written knew a good deal about the Parousia, for even the teaching about the Man of Lawlessness is given them only by way of reminder, and not as communicating new information, 2 Thessalonians 2:5.

Such people would hardly be in ignorance of such fundamental teaching on the subject as is given in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. But again, the objection does not get us far. In the short time that he was in Thessalonica, Paul could not give all the teaching on the second coming that he would have wished.

Many matters were certainly left ungrasped by the Thessalonians. It is entirely natural that eager new converts should have fastened their attention on such an outstanding figure as the Man of Lawlessness without appreciating the fact that some of their number would die before the great day. Indeed, they may well not have given this matter any thought at all before the decease of some of their number forced it on their notice.

OTHER OBJECTIONS TURN ON THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

Thus, some urge that this figure does not appear elsewhere in Paul and therefore we cannot accept the idea as Pauline. To say this is to refute it. We cannot dismiss an idea because Paul produced it only once. For that matter, it does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament.

Not Paul had an eager, questing mind. He is more likely to have seized on the truth concerning this being than some at least of his contemporaries. There is no real objection here.

A variant of this objection dates the origin of the idea of the Man of Lawlessness too late to put it within the time of Paul. This objection maintains that the whole idea of the Man of Lawlessness is based on the Nero redivivus myth.

After Nero's death in 68 A.D., there appeared a number of people who claimed to be that emperor come to life once more. They were discredited, but the idea persisted that one day Nero would come back to life. Then he would put himself at the head of the forces of evil. The myth came to have a supernaturalistic tinge.

Nero was held to be demonic as well as human. Now, if the portrait of the Man of Lawlessness was drawn from the Nero redivivus myth, obviously, Paul could not have drawn it. The idea did not gain currency till after his death.

But the idea of the anti-Christ is far older than the Nero redivivus myth, as Bousset, for example, has shown. It goes back long before the time of Paul, and there is no reason for holding that 2 Thessalonians 2 is based on the late myth. Consequently, the objection falls to the ground.

Thus, we see that there are various ways of putting the objection from eschatology, but none of them is decisive. The eschatological teachings in the two epistles are not contradictory, but complementary.

1. There are some who think that a difference in authorship is indicated by the fact that, whereas 1 Thessalonians is warm and friendly in tone, 2 Thessalonians is cold and rather formal.

The difference is difficult to sustain. Frame points out that the vehement self-defence in the First Epistle accounts for a good deal of its warmth, and that if this were omitted, the differences in tone “would not be perceptible.”

Again, the coldness alleged in the tone of 2 Thessalonians is very largely due to a few expressions. Thus Paul says, “We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren,” and adds, “even as it is meet” 2 Thessalonians 1:3. But this is probably to be understood as a protestation that his praise of them in the First Epistle was no more than was right.

Again, the objection that we meet authoritative commands, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, and elsewhere, overlooks the fact that throughout that whole section, there is an undertone of genuine brotherly warmth. Paul is very concerned to bring back into full fellowship some whose conduct had raised a barrier. But he is just as loving as he is authoritative. Thus, while admittedly 2 Thessalonians is slightly cooler in tone than the First Epistle, it does not seem as though the difference amounts to much. Even if we were to grant all that the objectors put forward, it still would prove little.

Writers are not always in the same mood, and we have no reason for thinking of Paul as an exception. Moreover, as we saw earlier, there is good reason for thinking that when he wrote 2 Thessalonians, Paul was experiencing a joyful reaction from a time of discouragement.

It would not be surprising if a later letter failed to reproduce such a mood, especially if it revealed that some had failed to give heed to instructions given in that first letter. Moreover, we know from 2 Thessalonians 3:2 that Paul was in a somewhat difficult situation when he wrote that letter. Thus, it does not seem as though any of the objections is compelling.

There is none for which an answer does not lie ready to hand. There is, accordingly, no reason why we should not accept the positive evidence and accept this Epistle as an authentic writing of Paul. (The New International Commentary on the New Testament. The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians. Leon Morris.)

THE LETTER. THE DATE AND PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

The book of 2 Thessalonians is a letter from Paul, 2 Thessalonians 1:1 / 2 Thessalonians 3:17. The apostle Paul begins his letter by mentioning Silas and Timothy, 2 Thessalonians 1:1. Early sources in church history that attribute this letter to Paul include Clement of Alexandria (200 A.D.), Tertullian (200 A.D.), and Irenaeus (200 A.D.).

Paul and his friends received news from Thessalonica after that church had received the first letter. This news showed that the Thessalonians still needed someone to teach them about some subjects. They had not understood some of what was in the first letter. So, the purpose of the second letter was to make things clear to them.

Paul wrote this letter to reemphasise the coming return of Jesus Christ. Some of the people in Thessalonica had thought that Jesus had already returned; this letter was written to correct any misunderstandings.

It appears that they remained strong in the Lord despite persecution, **2 Thessalonians 1:3-4**. But it is apparent from this letter that a misunderstanding about the Lord's coming was present in the church. Some of the members were being troubled by false reports, **2 Thessalonians 2:1-2**, and others had stopped working, perhaps assuming that the Lord's imminent return meant one did not need to work anymore, **2 Thessalonians 3:11-12**.

OUTLINE

Introduction, **2 Thessalonians 1:1-12**
 The Coming Of The Lord, **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12**
 Prayers and Appeals, **2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5**
 Warnings Against Idleness And Disobedience, **2 Thessalonians 3:6-15**
 Concluding Words, **2 Thessalonians 3:16-18**

INTRODUCTION

As we saw in our introduction to the Thessalonian letters, **1 Thessalonians** was written shortly after the establishment of the church in Thessalonica, **Acts 17:1-9**, around 50-52 A.D. We also saw that the coming of Christ was mentioned in each chapter. The second letter appears to have been written just a few months, perhaps a year later, whilst Paul was in Corinth.

We know that he stayed in Corinth for eighteen months, **Acts 18:11**, and so Paul can have written the first letter at the beginning of his stay, and written the second letter toward the end of his stay, around 53 A.D.

2 Thessalonians contains three short chapters, and again, the theme of the return of Christ runs throughout. After reading through **2 Thessalonians**, you would have noticed that the church in Thessalonica seemed to remain strong in the Lord despite the persecution they were receiving, **2 Thessalonians 1:3-4**, even though there was a lot of misunderstanding concerning Jesus' return.

Some were troubled by false reports concerning the Lord's return, **2 Thessalonians 2:1-2**, and there were other members who simply thought that Jesus' return was so imminent that they actually stopped working because they thought they didn't have to work anymore, **2 Thessalonians 3:11-12**.

Paul wanted to encourage the saints in a time of persecution whilst also warning them about the many false conceptions concerning the Lord's return, and so inform the church on what they should do in terms of discipline, about those who refuse to work.

THE TEXT

“Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”. **2 Thessalonians 1:1**

It's interesting that when we write letters to people today, we usually sign the letter at the end to inform the recipient who wrote it, but here in New Testament times, I think it's worth pointing out that the author(s) started by informing

the recipients who the letter is from. (Paraphrased from William Kendriksen New Testament Commentary 1&2 Thessalonians page 37)

In this case, the authors are Paul, who was also the author of half the books in the New Testament and formerly known as Saul of Tarsus, who was a great persecutor of the church, Acts 9:1-2. A little later, he became known as the ‘apostle to the Gentiles,’ Acts 9:15.

Silas, who was also known as Silvanus, was a messenger from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, Acts 15:22 / Acts 15:27. He was also a prophet who encouraged the saints in Antioch, Acts 15:32. He went on to become Paul’s travelling companion, Acts 15:34 / Acts 15:40-41, and suffered alongside Paul whilst in Philippi, Acts 16:19-25. The persecution and imprisonment didn’t stop him from being devoted to serving the Lord, as together with Paul, they established the church in Thessalonica, Acts 17:1-4.

Timothy, whom Paul mentions in many of his letters, was also known as Timotheus and was a travelling companion of Paul, Acts 16:1-3. Timothy himself was a recipient of two of Paul’s letters, 1 Timothy 1:2 / 2 Timothy 1:2. He also understood what it meant to suffer for the cause when he was imprisoned, Hebrews 13:23.

The recipients of the letter were the church that met in the city of Thessalonica, which we know was the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia. Christians like Jason, Acts 17:9, Aristarchus, and Secundus, Acts 20:4, were all members of this congregation.

We know from Acts 17:1-9 that Paul, whilst on his second missionary journey, arrived at Thessalonica and went straight to the local synagogue and used the gatherings for the Sabbath as a way to evangelise to the Jews, to which he had some success, even amongst the Gentiles.

Notice also that all Christians are in two places at the same time. Physically, these saints were in Thessalonica, but spiritually, they are ‘in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,’ 2 Thessalonians 1:1/ 1 Thessalonians 1:1.

This is a theme that Paul speaks a lot about in his letters. For example, when you read through the Ephesian letter, you will find that the phrase ‘in Christ’ is mentioned fifteen times. When you read through the letter to the Philippians, one hundred and sixty-four times, Paul reminds us that we are ‘in Christ’ in one form or another.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Other Thessalonians were in darkness, in sin, in the ‘world’ and in a state of alienation from God, but these were in the true and Almighty God.’

“Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”. 2 Thessalonians 1:2

As Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians and most of his letters, grace and peace are what a Christian has when they are in Christ. ‘Charis’, which is the Greek word for ‘grace’, means unmerited favour that we receive from God; it cannot be earned, deserved or merited.

As we don’t have anything to pay for it, it is a gift from God. Grace is God’s active favour by which he bestows his greatest gift on those who deserve the greatest punishment. Remember, grace isn’t just about saving us, grace also sustains us.

‘Eirene’ is the Greek word for ‘peace’; in Hebrew, it would be ‘shalom,’ which is what all Christians have because of the grace that God gives us. It means a lot more than just being in the absence of trouble in our lives, although that would be included; it also means being at peace within ourselves, with God and our fellow man.

Hubbard, in his commentary, says the following.

‘God’s act of unmerited favour in Christ (grace) brings in its wake complete spiritual welfare (peace).’

Remember that grace and peace both come from God and cannot be found anywhere else. 1 Peter 5:10 reminds us that God is the Father of grace, and Hebrews 13:20 reminds us that God is a God of peace.

We know that grace and truth are from Christ according to John 1:17, and Jesus Himself is our peace according to Ephesians 2:14. As Paul writes, ‘from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’, he reminds us again that grace and peace ultimately come from God above.

THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER

“We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, among God’s churches, we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.” 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

Ask yourself, when was the last time you stopped to thank God for your brothers and sisters in Christ? If it’s been a while, why not stop what you’re doing and do so now?

Paul says he ‘ought always to thank God’, 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The KJV uses the word ‘bound’, which is the Greek word ‘opheilo’, and this carries with it the idea of being under obligation.

In other words, he felt it was his duty to thank God for his brothers and sisters in Thessalonica. Why? Because their faith and love were growing, 2 Thessalonians 2:3 / Romans 8:37. Remember that Paul had already encouraged them in this way back in 1 Thessalonians 1:3, and so now their faith was growing more and more; in other words, they were growing beyond measure.

They had come so far in the Christian faith in such a short time. This very young church, full of young Christians, had turned from idols to serve the living, true God, and they were growing, 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10. Their growth was also an answered prayer of Paul’s, 1 Thessalonians 3:12; no wonder he thanked God.

Concerning the words faith and love, Lightfoot writes the following.

“The words hyperauxanei and pleonaxei are carefully chosen; the former implying an internal, organic growth as of a tree; the other a diffusive, or expansive character, as of a flood irrigating the land” (Notes on the Epistles of Paul, p. 98.)

The word ‘trials’, 2 Thessalonians 1:4, is the Greek word ‘thlipseis’ and in general terms means any trials or troubles they might meet. The word ‘persecutions’ is the Greek word ‘diogmois’, which means assaults made because of their Christian convictions.

Michigan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘To be a true Christian in the time of peace is a great matter; but to be a true Christian in the season of persecution is greater.’

And so this church in Thessalonica was growing, and Paul was so happy about it. He couldn’t help but talk about them to other churches, 1 Thessalonians 1:8-9. In fact, he boasted about them; he boasted about their perseverance and their faith amid persecution, 2 Thessalonians 1:4.

Remember that this congregation was born in tribulation, Acts 17:1-9, and this persecution obviously continued, but they remained faithful, and they were continuing to grow, 2 Thessalonians 1:4 / 1 Thessalonians 1:3.

If anyone ever promised you, ‘become a Christian and your life will be free from problems,’ they have told you a lie. There are many Christians who became Christians under the false illusion that their lives will be free from trials and persecution.

Sadly, when difficult times come, they simply fall away. Jesus Himself warned His disciples that difficult times would come, **John 15:19-20 / John 16:33**. The apostles themselves went on to warn other Christians that difficult times would come, **Acts 14:22 / 1 Thessalonians 3:4 / 2 Timothy 3:12**.

Christians today should also expect difficult times, after all, we're still living in a world that is filled with sin and evil, and sometimes we have to suffer the consequences of the choices which others have made and ultimately because we have an enemy who seeks nothing less than to destroy us, **1 Peter 5:8-9**.

We should be thankful to God for the times when our lives are free from trials and persecution, but at the same time, we should always be prepared for those times.

It's especially during those difficult times that faith, love and patience are needed, **2 Thessalonians 1:3**. Our faith is that incredibly strong conviction of things which are unseen, **Hebrews 11:1**. It's knowing that God is in control and trusting Him to deliver us from those difficult times, **Job 19:25-27 / Habakkuk 3:17-19**.

Our love for each other is the love which was taught to us by God Himself, **1 Thessalonians 4:9**, and so it's through the example of the Father's love, **1 John 4:9-11**, and the example of Jesus' love, **1 John 3:16**. That love should increase more and more, **2 Thessalonians 1:3 / 1 Thessalonians 4:10 / 1 Thessalonians 3:12**, this is the kind of sacrificial love that helps us in difficult times.

In other words, when hard times come, we will be surrounded by brotherly love, which will help us through those times. We also need to have patience during difficult times.

This patience is based upon the hope we have, **Romans 8:25**, and is always strengthened when we remember others who went through hard times and when we keep our focus on Jesus, **Hebrews 12:1-3**. Patience makes us stronger and makes us complete, **James 1:3-4**.

“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. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 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. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.” **2 Thessalonians 1:5-10**

Paul continues to tell us that those who have remained faithful and patient through those difficult times, **2 Thessalonians 1:4**, that faith and patience are evidence of God's righteous judgment to come, and because we have endured trials and persecution, we have been counted as worthy of the kingdom of God, **2 Thessalonians 1:5**.

Remember that it is God who qualifies us for the kingdom, **Colossians 1:12**, and it is God who perfects, establishes, strengthens and settles us, **1 Peter 5:10**. It is part of God's righteous judgment to use difficult times to bring His own people to perfection, **2 Thessalonians 1:5 / Hebrews 12:5-10**.

Notice God's protection of His own. Paul says that God will repay those who trouble His people, trouble will come upon them, which will be a righteous payment, **2 Thessalonians 1:6 / Romans 2:4-11**.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The sufferings of the just and the triumphs of the wicked in this life are a sure proof that there will be a future judgment in which the wicked shall be punished and the righteous rewarded.’

Whilst those who cause trouble for Christians receive trouble in return, Christians will receive relief or rest depending on your translation, **2 Thessalonians 1:7**. The same relief enjoyed by Paul, Silas and Timothy, **2 Thessalonians 1:7**.

Also, notice that both the rest and the tribulation will be given at this time, **2 Thessalonians 1:7 / John 5:28-29**.

Take a moment to read the following passages and take a moment to think about what they are saying to those who go through persecution, **Revelation 14:13 / 2 Timothy 2:12 / Romans 8:18 / Romans 12:19-21**.

When will this relief be given to persecuted Christians? When the Lord is revealed from heaven, 2 Thessalonians 1:7 / 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, which, as we know, has been the theme of both letters to the Thessalonians.

The word ‘revealed’ is the Greek word ‘apokalupsis’, which simply means an unfolding or uncovering. It is the revelation of a person who, at present, is concealed. Right now, Jesus is in heaven, and so He is hidden from the world’s view, but one day He will be revealed by appearing, Colossians 3:1-4 / Titus 2:13 / Hebrews 9:28.

The use of the words, ‘blazing fire’, 2 Thessalonians 1:7, or ‘flaming fire’ as some translations have it, is used to indicate the Lord’s holiness, which is manifested in judgement, Exodus 3:2 / Exodus 19:16-20 / Isaiah 29:6 / Isaiah 66:15-16 / Daniel 7:9-10 / Psalm 50:3 / Psalm 97:3.

Lipscomb, in his commentary, says the following.

‘God’s coming for judgment in the Old Testament is described as his coming in fire, Exodus 3:2 / Daniel 7:9-10.

What is said of God is here ascribed to Christ. ‘The day (judgment) shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire’, 1 Corinthians 3:13.’

The apostle Paul reminds us that when Jesus is revealed from heaven, He is not coming on His own; He will come with His mighty angels, 2 Thessalonians 1:7 / Psalm 103:20 / Matthew 16:27 / Matthew 24:31 / Matthew 25:31 / Mark 8:38 / Luke 9:26 / 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

Why are the angels involved in His coming? Their function seems to be twofold: first, to gather the weeds, binding them in bundles to be burned; secondly, they will also gather the wheat into the Lord’s barn, Matthew 13:24-30 / Matthew 13:37-43 / Matthew 13:49.

Why is Jesus coming according to the text? 2 Thessalonians 1:8. Punishment, the KJV uses the word ‘vengeance’, and we know that vengeance belongs only to God, Deuteronomy 32:35 / Romans 12:19-21, and remember what we saw in 2 Thessalonians 1:6, it is a righteous thing for God repay those who trouble Christians.

But exactly who is it that will be punished? 2 Thessalonians 1:8. Those who don’t know God, Matthew 25:1-12 / Romans 1:18-23, and those who haven’t obeyed the Gospel of Jesus, Matthew 7:21-23 / Revelation 22:14-15.

But what exactly is the Gospel? 2 Thessalonians 1:8. The Greek word for ‘Gospel’ is ‘euaggelion’, which simply means ‘a good message’. But what exactly is that good message? Romans 1:16-17 / 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

The good message is simply the good news concerning Jesus’ life, death, burial and resurrection, 1 Corinthians 14:1-4, all of which point us to live by faith so we can be made right with God through faith and receive eternal life.

As we know, not everyone knows God because they don’t want to know God, and not everyone will do what He asks. It is those people who will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, 2 Thessalonians 1:9 / Matthew 25:30 / Matthew 25:41, and from the glory of His power, 2 Thessalonians 1:9. This is what hell is: it’s the absence of God. It’s eternal separation from God.

Denney, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If there is any truth in Scripture at all, then this is true, that those who stubbornly refuse to submit to the gospel of Christ, and to love and obey Jesus Christ, incur at the Last Advent an infinite and irreparable loss. They pass into a night upon which no morning dawns.’

In other words, there will be a penalty to pay for all the trouble they caused Christians, for not knowing God, and for not doing as He asks. Some religious people have concluded from 2 Thessalonians 1:9 that the Bible teaches that the punishment will be annihilation, a going out of existence, being burned into nothingness.

However, this view is contrary to the Greek word translated ‘destruction’ and to other Scriptural teaching, 1 Corinthians 5:5 / 1 Thessalonians 5:3 / 1 Timothy 6:9. The Greek word for ‘destruction’ is the word ‘olethros’, which literally means ‘a loss of wellbeing’, Mark 9:43-48 / Matthew 25:41 / Matthew 25:46 / Revelation 14:9-11.

The very fact that this destruction is ‘everlasting’ shows that it does not amount to ‘annihilation’ or ‘going out of existence’. On the contrary, it indicates an existence ‘away from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might’, 2 Thessalonians 1:9.

This banishment from loving fellowship with Christ implies expulsion from ‘the glory (radiant splendour) of his might’ as it is manifested in the salvation of the saints. (New Testament commentary 1&2 Thessalonians William Hendrickson Page 160-161.)

Nobody knows when Jesus will return, although many have speculated and tried to calculate the exact date. When He does come, its distinguishing characteristic will be its glory. The wicked will taste God’s vengeance and the saints will reflect His glory, 2 Thessalonians 1:10 / 1 John 3:2 / Philippians 3:20 / Romans 8:18.

At the moment, many people reject Him, despise Him, and use His name in vain, but when He returns, everyone will bow down and confess His name, Philippians 2:9-11. Jesus will be glorified in His saints simply because of what He accomplished through His life, death, resurrection and what He is doing now in heaven.

In other words, because of His power to change people’s rebellious lives around to lives that are holy and true, Philippians 1:20 / 1 Peter 2:9. Not only will Jesus be glorified in us, but He will also be ‘marvelled at’ or held in admiration by those who believe, 2 Thessalonians 1:10 / 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

SUMMARY

And so, in summary, judgment day is coming, 1 Thessalonians 1:10 / Hebrews 9:27, which will be a great, long-awaited day for Christians. It will be a time of relief and rest for those who have remained faithful whilst being supported by their brethren in love and have been patient in their trials and persecution for the sake of the kingdom of God, Revelation 21:4. It will be a time to enter our eternal glory in which Jesus Himself will be glorified.

For those who aren’t Christians, this will be a terrible day, a day of vengeance which will be their just payment for the troubles they brought upon God’s people, for not knowing God or obeying the Gospel, 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 / Acts 17:31. It will be a time of punishment that lasts forever, out of the presence and power of our Lord Jesus.

“With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. 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.” 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

There is no doubt that the apostles were men of prayer, and here they inform the church in Thessalonica what their prayer is.

1. That ‘God would make them worthy of His calling’, 2 Thessalonians 1:11 / 2 Thessalonians 2:14 / Philippians 1:27 / Ephesians 4:1.
2. That ‘by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness’, 2 Thessalonians 1:11 / 1 Thessalonians 1:3.
3. That ‘their every deed prompted by faith,’ 2 Thessalonians 1:11.

We have to remember that the blessings we receive from God and God’s presence with them are based upon our faithful activity, James 2:24 / Galatians 5:16 / Hebrews 11. This is important to remember because we don’t get God’s blessings and His presence in our lives simply because we do good deeds, Ephesians 2:9.

The reason for these prayers is simply to allow Jesus to be glorified in them as Christians, 2 Thessalonians 1:12 / John 15:1-8 / Romans 1:20-22 / Ephesians 3:21 / Galatians 5:23. In other words, Paul wanted them to glorify

God and His Son through their faith and deeds. Paul began this chapter with an allusion to grace [2 Thessalonians 1:2](#), and he closes the chapter on the same note, [2 Thessalonians 1:12](#).

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

“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.” [2 Thessalonians 2:1-2](#)

In some way, Paul had learned that the return of the Lord had become the subject of intense debate in Thessalonica. They were concerned about the coming of the Lord and their being gathered to Him, [2 Thessalonians 2:1](#). Morris, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The expression ‘gathering together’ is found nowhere else in the New Testament except in [Hebrews 10:25](#), where it signifies the gathering together of the Christians for worship.’

It is possible that they had written to him because the Thessalonian church had become disturbed and confused by what they had been hearing concerning the Lord’s return, [2 Thessalonians 2:1](#). Some did not believe that Jesus would return, others said that He had returned already, and others asserted that His return was imminent.

What is more, among those who were circulating these conflicting statements, some had attempted to give authority and weight to what they were saying by using Paul’s name, claiming to be quoting his words, or producing letters that they alleged were written by him, [2 Thessalonians 2:2](#).

But as we shall see in the next few verses, Paul is going to refute both the false statements and the counterfeit letters. As he attempts to settle the minds of these believers, who had formerly been pagans, [1 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#), all of these false ideas concerning Jesus’ return by informing them that certain things have to happen first.

THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

“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 worshipped, 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? 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. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour 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. [2 Thessalonians 2:3-12](#)

Paul tells us that BEFORE Christ returns, there must first be a great rebellion or falling away, 2 Thessalonians 2:3 / 1 Timothy 4:1-2. The apostle warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29-30 that this would occur AFTER Paul left them, and it would happen from forces within and outside of the church.

Paul also warned Timothy that in latter times some would depart from the faith, 1 Timothy 4:1-2. The apostle Peter also warned the Christians in Asia Minor that there would be false teachers and many Christians would follow their destructive ways, 2 Peter 2:1-2.

What exactly is Paul teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12? First of all, notice that Paul uses several expressions and phrases which need to be clarified if we are to understand his teaching.

1. The KJV uses the phrase ‘The mystery of iniquity’ in 2 Thessalonians 2:7, which simply means ‘lawlessness’.

The word translated ‘iniquity’ is the Greek word ‘anomias’, and is made up of ‘a’, which, as a Greek prefix, means ‘without’, and ‘nomos’, which means ‘law’. Therefore, iniquity is ‘without law’, hence, ‘lawlessness’. This ‘anomia’ is the condition or state of being ‘without law’ and is the result of being ‘a theos’, and this is ‘without God’, or ‘atheist’.

2. What is lawlessness?

1 John 3:4 defines lawlessness when it states: ‘everyone who practises sin does lawlessness, and lawlessness is sin.’

Notice that this refers to ‘sin’ as a way of life, as a practice, and not as an isolated sinful act. And so, the ‘mystery of lawlessness’ is ‘the mystery of sin’, 2 Thessalonians 2:7.

3. What is the meaning of the word ‘mystery’?

A word from one language sometimes has a different meaning when translated into another language. The Greek word ‘musterion’ certainly looks like our English word ‘mystery’, but its New Testament meaning is very different.

We think of a ‘mystery’ as something secret or hidden, something which cannot be understood; something beyond comprehension. But in Greek, the word describes something hidden, which has been revealed to and is understood by those who have undergone initiation into the society or cult.

So, we might ask the question, ‘Why does God tolerate sin?’ Because this is a question often asked, and we can well imagine these former pagans in Thessalonica wondering why God does not destroy the one who is the ‘Father of lies’, the Devil, or Satan, who is behind all the wickedness the world has ever seen, John 8:44.

Probably, when the young Christians in Thessalonica, who had formerly been pagans, worshipping idols, 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, received Paul’s two letters in 50-51 A.D., they had little understanding, of the history of God’s great plan of redemption, which we now know was being worked out throughout Old Testament times, and eventually culminated in the coming of Christ into the world as God’s Lamb, to ‘take away the sin of the world’, John 1:29.

They had doubtlessly learned that the one true God, about whom they now worshipped, is all-powerful and all-knowing, and they may well have asked the questions which have been asked a countless number of times:

Why does God permit evil to exist? Why does He not destroy Satan? Paul then attempts to resolve his readers’ confusion about the coming of Christ and to help them to understand the working out of God’s plan of salvation.

His explanation will not diminish the hardship these early Christians would encounter, as the persecution of the church spread through the Roman world, but it would, at the very least, enable them to recognise that the final outcome in the conflict between Good and Evil lies in the hands of God, and will result in the victory of truth and righteousness.

Notice that firstly in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul does not attempt to predict the date of Christ’s return, but he does reveal that, before that return, certain events of tremendous significance must take place, and the first thing he tells

them is that, BEFORE the Lord returns, there will be what he describes as ‘the falling away’, or ‘THE apostasy’, or ‘THE rebellion’, 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

It is important to notice that the word ‘rebellion’ used here in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is the Greek word ‘apostasia’, which, in the A.V., has not been translated, but has been ‘transliterated’, that is, turned into English, to give us the word ‘apostasy’. And notice, also, that the word is prefaced by the definite article, ‘the’, giving us ‘the apostasy’. In the course of the church’s history, there have been several departures from ‘the faith,’ ‘fallings away’ followed by ‘revivals,’ but nothing as significant as the ‘THE falling away’, which the Lord says must happen BEFORE His Return.

This seems to be in line with the observation of the Lord Jesus Himself when He asked the question in Luke 18:8, ‘when the Son of Man comes, will he find (the) faith on the earth?’

Secondly, Paul warns the church about someone, 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The Greek might be rendered, ‘the embodiment of evil,’ or, ‘the personification of evil’ which indicated that some person is intended here whom he variously describes as, that ‘man of sin’, ‘the son of perdition’, ‘that lawless one’, which indicated that some person is intended in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning ‘the son of perdition’.

‘Judas is the only other person so designated in the New Testament, John 17:12. Just as he was the object of prior prophecy, so also is the apostle of apostasy.’

Thirdly, his claims, his methods and also his end, are all revealed.

- a. He opposes God, 2 Thessalonians 2:4.
- b. He exalts himself above God, 2 Thessalonians 2:4.
- c. He sits ‘in the temple of God’, 2 Thessalonians 2:4.
- d. He shows himself as God, 2 Thessalonians 2:4.
- e. To achieve his goal, he performs ‘signs and lying wonders’, 2 Thessalonians 2:9.

But, and this is important, He is called ‘the son of destruction or perdition’, 2 Thessalonians 2:3, and that word, ‘perdition’ indicated that he is ‘doomed to destruction’. The Greek word for “destruction” in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 is the same word used in Revelation 17:10.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:5, we have an ‘aside,’ a comment. Paul reminds them that he told them this when he was with them. 2 Thessalonians 2:6 means, ‘so now you know what is holding him back until the time comes for him to be revealed.’

There is great comfort in this statement because it means that the manifestation of this wicked character is not unexpected, and, furthermore, it is under the control of God, who will allow him to make his appearance at the time of God’s choosing!

2 Thessalonians 2:7, virtually says, that we see sin already at work in the world, and ‘He Who permits it,’ that is God Himself, will allow it to continue under His ‘permissive will’ until this evil being made his appearance, but the Lord will return and ‘the Lawless One’ will be ‘consumed’, ‘destroyed’, ‘annihilated’ by ‘the breath of His mouth’, 2 Thessalonians 2:8, i.e., ‘the Word of Christ, the Sword of the Spirit’, Ephesians 6:17.

Remember that these details do not come from Paul himself. This is the Holy Spirit’s revelation of what will happen at the end of the age. 1 John 2:18 refers to ‘antichrists’ and ‘the antichrist’. Are Satan and the lawless man of 2 Thessalonians 2, the same? Are the events described in 2 Thessalonians 2 in the future, and do some Christians face a terrible persecution?

Are all people who deny the Sonship and incarnation of Jesus to be regarded as antichrists, or is the term reserved for New Testament Gnosticism and Docetism? If we’re going to answer these questions, let’s first make a statement regarding 1 John 2:18. We must notice that nowhere does John use the term ‘The Antichrist’.

In fact, in the New Testament Scriptures, the word ‘antichristos’ is unique to John’s first and second letters, and the definite article is not found in the Greek text. ‘You have heard that antichrist comes’, 1 John 2:18, the word simply means ‘against Christ’, and it is used in an adjectival sense.

In other words, this is not a person or an individual, and it is not used as a title, but defines an attitude or a disposition that rejects Christ. This becomes evident if we summarise what John wrote. John, in his first letter, 1 John 2:18, introduces the subject.

1. ‘You have heard’, in these words, he implies that he is reminding them of something about which they had already been forewarned.
2. ‘The antichrist is coming’. Notice that he uses the future tense.
3. ‘Even now there are many antichrists’. He reveals that this opposition to Christ already exists. Paul endorses this in 2 Thessalonians 2:7.
4. John then defined the word ‘antichrist’ in terms that cannot be misunderstood. ‘He, ‘anyone’ is antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son.’

This definition is expanded in 2 John 7, of his second letter, where he declared that ‘many deceivers have gone out into the world’, that is, people ‘who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, any such person is a deceiver and antichrist’.

So, according to the literal definition of the word, ‘antichristos’ means contra, or against Christ. It does not describe one who claims to be the Christ or who assumes the authority of the Christ, but identifies one who denies the very identity of Christ and His authority. The Lord himself said, ‘He who is not with me is against me’, in Matthew 12:30. In fact, John did not use the word ‘pseudochristos’ in referring to those whom he described as ‘antichrist’. He was not writing about ‘false Christs’ nor was he accusing these people of claiming to be Christ. According to Matthew 24:24 and Mark 13:22, ‘pseudochristos’ was the term used by the Lord Himself in answering His disciples’ questions about the destruction of the Temple.

How, then, has the concept of ‘The Antichrist’ arisen? Why has this attitude of opposition to Christ become ‘personified’? To find the answer to this question, it is necessary to go back to the Old Testament scriptures.

After the Babylonian captivity, there grew up among the Jews a belief that declared that, at some time in the future, someone or some power would come to wage war against the people of God. They believed that this enemy of God’s people would appear before the coming of the Messiah, and would be defeated by ‘the Coming One,’ i.e., the Messiah.

There are several passages, notably in the Book of Daniel, which relate to the future of the Kingdom of Judah after the captivity and which contain references to this coming conflict and the one who would instigate it, Daniel 7:19-28 / Daniel 8:20 / Daniel 8:24 / Daniel 11:36-24.

It is surely not difficult, then, to appreciate that the early Christians, and the Jewish Christians in particular, who were certainly familiar with the Old Covenant Scriptures and who recognised themselves as the truly spiritual people of God, would find it easy to relate to this idea.

When Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, he knew that his readers were concerned about the Lord’s return, believing that it was imminent. But in 2 Thessalonians 2, he points out that the return of the Christ will be preceded by a falling away from the faith, and by the revelation ‘apokalupsis’ of ‘the Man of Sin’, whom he further describes as ‘the son of perdition’, 2 Thessalonians 2:3 / John 17:12.

However, when we try to identify this ‘man of sin’, we run into difficulties! Are we to look for an evil person or an evil system or organisation? We may immediately rule out the notion that a system or organisation is indicated because Paul said that ‘the son of perdition’ would be identified by his conduct.

Notice first that 2 Thessalonians 2:3 requires the recognition of a human being who is described as ‘that man of sin’. Notice, also, that personal pronouns are used, ‘he’, ‘himself’, and ‘his’, because they indicate an individual, 2 Thessalonians 2:4 / 2 Thessalonians 2:9.

Notice that the manner in which he behaves is that of a human despot ‘He exalts himself’, 2 Thessalonians 2:4. According to the A.V., ‘He, as God, sitteth in the Temple of God showing himself that he is God’, but in fact, the words ‘as God’ are not in the Greek text.

The expression used is ‘esti theos’, which means ‘as a god’. The original Greek is much more vivid in bringing out the terrible arrogance with which he presents himself. He assumes the attitude and posture of a god, 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

In fact, our English translation does not bring out the appalling, blasphemous attitude of this ‘Man of Sin’. ‘He will oppose’, 2 Thessalonians 2:4, the word means to exalt, ‘elevate’ himself above every so-called ‘god’ or object of worship.

‘He will sit himself in the temple of God’, 2 Thessalonians 2:4. The “temple” is not a reference to the Jewish house of worship. The word ‘naon’, which is translated as ‘temple’, does not describe the whole temple complex. It describes the ‘holy place’ or ‘the holy of holies’, the sanctuary.

It may refer to the church, 1 Corinthians 6:19, or to the church as God’s spiritual house, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 / Ephesians 2:21. In other words, he may simply look like another church member. And the word ‘kathizo’ means ‘sitting,’ ‘taking his seat,’ suggesting the arrogant manner with which he behaves.

We should also notice that this evil being comes ‘into’ the temple, not ‘in’ the temple, 2 Corinthians 2:4. It conveys the thought of ‘intrusion’ and emphasises the intense profanity of his conduct. Not only does he not enter the temple, but forcing his way into the very heart of the temple, into its most holy places.

Remember, the temple of God was in, but the Roman army destroyed the temple in AD 70, soon after Paul wrote. So these words may not mean that the Man of Sin will enter a man-made temple. Paul might have been using picture language to say that this Man of Sin will try to put himself in the place of God.

‘He will claim to be God’, 2 Thessalonians 2:4. Although not himself Satan, he will be the tool of Satan, since his coming would be ‘by the activity of Satan’, 2 Thessalonians 2:9.

Hubbard, in his commentary, says the following.

‘His coming reveals itself in all power (to work miracles) and signs (significant, meaningful miracles) and wonders (amazing their observers). In Greek, ‘lying’ seems to apply to all three.’

Notice Satan is using every deception within his power to keep people from being saved. And people are falling for the lies because they do not have a love of the truth, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10.

The AMP version uses the word ‘counterfeit’ to describe these signs and wonders. In other words, they look real and may even feel real, but they’re not; they are fake. We must learn to test everything, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, test the spirits, 1 John 4:1.

We noted earlier that believers of the New Testament period would be familiar with the events of the Inter-Testamental Period, when the Jews were opposed by Antiochus 4th of Syria, who gave himself the title ‘Antiochus Epiphanes’, ‘Antiochus the Brightness’.

As you will see from the Daniel references already given, Daniel 7:19-28 / Daniel 8:20 / Daniel 8:24 / Daniel 11:36-24, Paul’s description of the ‘Man of Sin’ follows very closely the description given of the Syrian tyrant.

We suggest, therefore, that these identification marks certainly appear to point to an evil individual rather than to an organisation, although some commentators have suggested a different explanation.

Let us remember that when Paul wrote these things, it is understandable that, in the light of the persecution being suffered by the church, these early Christians thought that this was a reference to the power of the Roman Empire, and, even more particularly, to one or other of several Emperors personally responsible for instigating religious persecution.

It was widely known, for instance, that Emperor Caligula had planned to erect an image of himself in the temple in Jerusalem, believing himself to be a god, so the connection was not difficult to make.

But, since Caligula was assassinated in 41 A.D., and Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians ten years later, Caligula, evil man though he undoubtedly was, could not possibly be the person to whom the passage refers. Paul clearly predicts that this person would make his appearance at some time in the future, 2 Thessalonians 2:2.

Closer to our own time, the Protestant Reformers were convinced that the occupant of the Vatican throne is the one concerning whom Paul spoke, and no doubt there are still some people who hold this view.

Let's summarise the answers to the above questions.

1. Satan and the 'man of sin' are not the same person. Satan is nowhere in the Scriptures described in human terms. He is never called a 'man'. The Man of Sin is his tool.

2. Since the events described by Paul in 2 Thessalonians must happen BEFORE the Lord's return, it is reasonable to believe that there will, indeed, be a future time of persecution. John is warning his readers that, at some time in the future, there would be an intensification of the rejection of, and opposition to, Christ, such as already existed in his own days.

3. Although it is true that the 'Docetics,' 'dokeo', which means to seem, denied that the Lord's body was human, and only 'seemed' to be real, and the 'Gnostics' claimed that Jesus was only 'a messenger of the supreme God', sent to bring 'gnosis,' knowledge, the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that anyone who denies the Father and the Son is 'antichrist', 1 John 2:22, no matter the reason for the denial. After just over two thousand years, the situation has not changed.

By means of the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit continues to bear testimony to the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and anyone who hears this testimony, understands it but refuses to believe it, is an antichrist and stands under condemnation, John 3:36.

I personally believe 'the man of lawlessness' is speaking about the Roman Emperor Domitian, although I wouldn't be dogmatic about it. Domitian was the self-proclaimed "Lord and God" and ruthless dictator, who reigned from AD 81 to 96. Domitian demanded to be addressed as "My Lord God, Domitian". History tells us that Domitian was full of himself and claimed to be a deity, Daniel 11:36-37.

Emperors reigned with such power and distinction that Roman temples were erected to each one of them. Emperors were worshipped in these temples as Gods and Lords.

Under Domitian, those who refused to worship him as a God were subjected to various punishments from exile to death, Revelation 17:3 / Revelation 17:10. He brought severe persecutions against Christians as foretold by Daniel, Daniel 7:1-12 / Daniel 7:15-28, and pictured in Revelation 13.

DOES GOD SEND POWERFUL DELUSIONS?

They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved, 2 Thessalonians 2:10, and so God sends them a powerful delusion to believe the lie, so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness, 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12.

Before we get into the text, we must remember that God doesn't deceive anyone; He wants us to know the truth, so we can live by it, John 8:32 / John 14:6.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There is a peculiarity of the Hebrew language which does not always distinguish between permission and commandment. Often the Scripture attributes to God what He only permits to be done; or what in the course of His providence He does not hinder.’

When it comes to understanding how God sends powerful delusions, it may be helpful to go back to understand how God dealt with people in the past.

PHARAOH'S ATTITUDE

In Exodus 5:1-2, we read about Pharaoh's attitude towards God; he didn't know God and wasn't interested in anything relating to Him. Later, we read about him hardening his own heart towards the truth concerning God, during the second plague of frogs, Exodus 8:15. Later still, God would harden Pharaoh's heart after five plagues had already occurred, Exodus 10:20.

In other words, Pharaoh's part in hardening his own heart was an active part. He chose not to obey the will of God. God's part was simply to empower Pharaoh to exercise that choice. This is evident from the fact that Pharaoh was held fully responsible for his hardness and punished for it.

When Pharaoh was being told the truth by Moses concerning the real God's intentions, he scoffed and refused. Moses was prepared to demonstrate miraculous powers to convince him. Imagine Moses' surprise when Pharaoh's magicians replicated those early miracles, Exodus 7:11-13 / Exodus 7:22 / Exodus 8:7.

In each case, it seemed like a loss, because ‘Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as God had said.’ However, this allowed the plagues to become stronger and more effective, and even the magicians themselves had to proclaim, ‘This is the finger of God,’ Exodus 8:18-19. God told Pharaoh the truth but allowed him to believe his lying magicians instead, Exodus 7:11-12 / Exodus 7:20-22 / Exodus 8:6-7.

KING AHAB'S ATTITUDE

After reading 1 Kings 21:25-26 / 1 Kings 22:8 / 1 Kings 22:19-23, and taking note that Micaiah isn't relating a historical event, but a vision, what we see here is that God didn't in reality command that the false prophets lie to Ahab. He simply permitted them to do so, as they had already been doing.

Micaiah's vision related in figurative language how God would use Ahab's own false prophets to bring about his downfall. The fact that Ahab was punished shows that Ahab himself was held responsible for rejecting the truth and believing the lie.

God didn't lie to Ahab, nor did He put lies in the mouth of Ahab's prophets. God simply made use in a providential way of those who were already lying to Ahab. The false prophets lied because they chose to lie, and Ahab believed them because he chose to believe them.

ISRAEL'S ATTITUDE

Notice in Isaiah 6:9-10 that the hardness of the heart on the part of Israel is attributed to the prophet himself. In John 12:37-40, when Jesus quotes the Isaiah passage, He appears to attribute the hardness of Israel's hearts to God. In Matthew 13:15, when Jesus quotes the Isaiah passage, He appears to attribute the hardness of Israel's hearts to the Jews themselves. In Acts 28:27, we read that the apostle Paul quotes the Isaiah passage and like Jesus, he too attributed the Jews' hardness of heart to the Jews themselves. When we put all these passages together, it becomes very clear that the prophet was to preach until they grew weary of his preaching, but he kept on preaching. God wouldn't overrule their stubborn wills, nor force them to believe His truth. But the real offenders were the Jews themselves; they hardened their own hearts, closed their own eyes, and shut their own ears because they were satisfied with the way things were.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, we read that the coming of the lawless one reveals itself in all power; he will use counterfeit power, signs and miracles to deceive people, Matthew 7:21-23 / Daniel 7:25 / Revelation 13:13-15. The word 'counterfeit' means something which appears to be genuine but isn't. There was going to be a lying figure who would deceive 'those on their way to destruction', 2 Thessalonians 2:10.

This might make little sense until we realise who is being fooled and why. We get the same principle being taught by Paul in Romans 1:24-25, where we find God 'giving people over', which means He abandoned them to reap the rewards of their own evil actions.

This was their punishment for abandoning God. God gave them over in the 'sinful desires of their hearts', why? To let them learn what lust would plunge them into, the 'degrading of their bodies with one another', Romans 1:26-27. We also read that 'they exchanged the truth about God for a lie,' which means to exchange the truth of God for a lie reaches the depths of foolishness. This is true anytime the truth is exchanged for a lie, whether in faith or practice, Romans 3:4 / Romans 16:18.

The way of salvation is clearly taught in Romans 1:24-25 and 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. Those who believe the truth and obey it shall be saved, but those who don't believe the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness, shall be finally and forever condemned.

People who won't accept God's morality, but who love evil, will be quite easily deceived by Satan. People who take pleasure in doing wrong will be blinded and hardened. They will be deceived. They shall then have no difficulty in believing a lie, not the truth. Satan's lie consists of getting men to believe him instead of God, Genesis 3:1-6.

We must remember that God does not lie, Hebrews 6:18 / Titus 1:2 / 2 Timothy 2:13, but God has created us in such a way that if we do not love the truth, we will come to believe what we want to believe.

The atheist will examine the evidence and conclude that there is no God. Not because the evidence demands his conclusion, but because he is not willing to accept God and His will.

The evolutionist examines the evidence and concludes that all forms of life have evolved from one common ancestor. He reaches that conclusion, not because the evidence is strong, but because he is not willing to believe otherwise.

Many who walk by feelings and emotions in religious matters do so, not because the evidence demands such action, but because such is pleasing and satisfying to them, Proverbs 14:12. And so, it is to these and many others, God ‘sends strong delusion,’ 2 Thessalonians 2:11.

He doesn’t lie to them, and He doesn’t take away their free will either. He tells them the truth, but He allows them to weigh the evidence and decide for themselves what they will believe.

Those who listen to truth, understand that the age of the miraculous has ceased, 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 / Hebrews 1:1-2, they won’t fall victim to all these counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders that many people today claim are real. Those who listen to truth live by faith, not by sight, 2 Corinthians 5:7. Those who belong to Christ will always test the spirits, 1 John 4:1 / 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

CONCLUSION

God told Pharaoh the truth but allowed him to believe his lying magicians instead, Exodus 7:11-12 / Exodus 7:20-22 / Exodus 8:6-7. God told Ahab the truth, but He did not force Ahab to believe it. God told the Jews of Jesus’ day the truth, but they were free to reject the truth, and most of them did.

God, in His word, tells us the truth, John 8:31-32. He doesn’t actively deceive any man, woman or child, but any person who does not love God’s truth will find a way to believe what he wants to believe, and God will allow him to do so.

Those who set themselves up as God’s enemies will often fall for the lies told by those who tell them what they want to hear. When Paul talked about the tumultuous events of the first century with the saints of Thessalonica, he said it had a purpose.

God allows delusion and falsehood to succeed so that those who refuse the truth will be invited to their own destruction. We all have the choice to follow the good or take pleasure in wickedness. Which will we choose? 2 Timothy 3:12-13.

STAND FIRM

“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits 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.” 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

After clearing up any possible misconceptions about the Lord’s return, Paul told the church in Thessalonica that two events must happen BEFORE Christ returns. He told them that a great rebellion must first take place, and the man of lawlessness has to be revealed.

Both these events will be the sad end of many Christians, as some would abandon the faith, whilst other Christians would be deceived by the man of lawlessness.

But for those Christians who remain faithful, a great blessing would come. The blessing of sharing in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 / 2 Thessalonians 2:14, which was Paul's prayer for the church as he thanked God once again for them, 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

Remember these are ones, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, who had heard the word proclaimed, they had believed and obeyed that word to the sanctification of their souls. These are not specific individuals chosen, but rather a type of individual. Those individuals who would love truth and whose hearts are fertile to receive God's word, Luke 8:1-15. These are the individuals who would receive that Word, believe that Word, obey that Word, and so be predestined to the adoption of children, Ephesians 1:5.

The Gospel, 2 Thessalonians 2:14, is that good news which is an invitation to the whole world that God wants to have fellowship with His greatest creation, mankind. It's this Good news that provided a way out, or a way of escape from God's coming wrath, 1 Timothy 2:4 / 2 Peter 3:9.

Through the preaching of the Gospel, God calls all of mankind and those who believe the preaching of the Gospel are sanctified, set apart by the Holy Spirit in their conversion, and so become God's loved ones and part of His elect.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'As we have noted again and again, in the New Testament, God's call, as used here, means 'God's call accepted.' It is the choice that men make which determines destiny. All men are called, but only those who hear, accept and obey are the truly 'called.'

Therefore, because of everything he has just said concerning the warning of the great falling away and the dangers which will come from the man of lawlessness, the apostle Paul tells them to stand firm, 2 Thessalonians 2:15 / 1 Corinthians 10:12 / 1 Corinthians 16:13 / Galatians 6:9, and hold fast to the teachings the apostles gave them, 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

It makes no difference whether the apostles taught verbally or taught through writing; they are both inspired by God, 2 Thessalonians 3:6 / 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The danger of falling away is a very real danger for every Christian, not only because we've all probably heard of or known someone who has fallen away, but the Bible clearly tells us that falling away is a real danger, Hebrews 6:4-6 / 2 Peter 2:20-22.

Imagine a husband and wife who are deeply and passionately in love with each other, and they go to bed and rise in the morning, only to find they don't love one another anymore. It doesn't happen like that.

What you find is that love relationship has been taken for granted, and over time, they discover that they just don't love one another as they did in the beginning.

And so, it's the same with our love relationship with God; we take that relationship with God for granted and over time, we find we just don't love Him as we did at first, and so falling away indelibly begins to happen. It doesn't happen overnight; it takes time, Revelation 2:4.

In order for us to help ourselves as Christians, we need to continue to do what the very first Christians did in Acts 2:42, and that is 'devote ourselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.' Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16 again, and let it sink in! What an amazing and very powerful verse this is. We are loved by God, and we receive comfort from knowing that He loves us and by the blessing of His grace. How much more does God have to do to demonstrate to the world how much He wants to bless everyone?

God and Jesus have already shown their love to all of mankind, but it's those Christians who have believed and obeyed the Gospel who recognise this eternal encouragement and good hope for this life and the life to come.

You can imagine, after all the different theories about Christ's returns and all the false accusations against Paul's teachings, these Christians certainly needed comforting or encouragement, as the NIV translates it, 2 Thessalonians 2:17 / 1 Thessalonians 4:18 / 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.

And to be sure that they don't fall away from the faith and don't fall for the deceptions of the man of lawlessness, they need to rely on the strength of God in their every good deed and word, 2 Thessalonians 2:17 / 1 Thessalonians 3:2 / 1 Peter 5:10.

Sharing in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ is only made possible with the help of God, as we understand the Father and Son's love for us. This should encourage us eternally as we are reminded of the sacrificial love of God through His Son, which gives us hope.

What a comfort that brings to our hearts, as God always wants to encourage us in everything we do and say for His glory, 2 Thessalonians 2:17. No wonder we should stop and take some time out from our busy lives to give thanks to Him.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

"As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance." 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

REQUEST FOR PRAYER

As we enter chapter three, we see once again that Paul expresses prayers for the saints who meet in Thessalonica, which is something he has done time and time again through these letters.

He requested that they might increase and abound in love, 1 Thessalonians 3:11, that the Lord might establish their hearts blameless in holiness, 1 Thessalonians 3:12.

He requested that God might sanctify them completely, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, that God might count them worthy of His calling, 2 Thessalonians 2:11, that the name of the Lord might be glorified in them, and they in Him, 2 Thessalonians 2:12.

He requested that Jesus and the Father might comfort their hearts and establish them in every good word and work, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17. And so not only do we need the prayers of those who lead us, but we too must be praying for them.

The word 'pray', 2 Thessalonians 3:1, is present tense in Greek, and it signifies a continuous action, 1 Thessalonians 5:16. Paul desires that they will continue to pray that 'the message of the Lord may be spread rapidly and be honoured', 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

Ellicott, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul was the most successful missionary who ever lived, and it could be that the inexhaustible fountain of his success was the sacred well of prayer. 'How much of a Christian teacher's power, increasing as time goes on, comes from the accumulation of intercession from his spiritual children!'

We know there is power in the Word of God, Romans 1:16 / Ephesians 6:17 / Hebrews 4:12, and we know God's word converts people, makes the simple wise, rejoices the heart, and so much more. We also know that God's word must be honoured, Acts 13:48, and must be treated with a certain great respect, Psalm 119:97.

The Thessalonian saints were doing just that, 2 Thessalonians 3:1. The word of God had changed their lives, and everyone knew about it; people saw it in their lives and heard it from their lips. They practised what they preached; the word of God had truly been planted in their hearts, and they were producing fruit, 1 Thessalonians 1:8 / 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

Paul continues to be specific concerning his prayer request, 2 Thessalonians 3:2. We need to understand that there will always be those who oppose truth, which comes from the world, and it also comes from within our congregations, 2 Corinthians 11:26. Why? Because not everyone has faith, 2 Thessalonians 3:2. Not everyone believed the Gospel.

Remember the persecution that followed the conversion of these brethren, Acts 17:5-10, but there was also opposition from within the church. But despite all this opposition, Paul reminds them that 'the Lord is faithful', 2 Thessalonians 3:3.

The Christians back then needed to learn the same lesson that Christians today need to learn, and that is any promises made by our God are promises that we can have complete confidence in, 2 Thessalonians 3:4. He will deliver the righteous, He will punish the wicked, Deuteronomy 7:9. He will strengthen us, He will protect us from the evil one. Time and time again, Paul has been saying to the church in Thessalonica, be strong because it is God who gives you the strength. It's God who will protect us from the evil one, but we must pray for these things to happen. Matthew 6:13 / Ephesians 6:13 / 1 Peter 5:8 / 2 Peter 2:9.

2 Thessalonians 3:4 is another amazing compliment for this young church. Paul's confidence wasn't just in the brethren who were doing what the apostles taught them, 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4.

The Lord who would help them to do and continue to do what was right, Matthew 10:22 / Galatians 6:9 / 2 Thessalonians 3:13, and do to and continue to do what the apostles had commanded, Matthew 7:21 / John 14:15 / James 1:22-22.

What a beautiful prayer 2 Thessalonians 3:5 is, 'May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance'. But how was the Lord going to do this?

Simply by revelation, in the first century, God revealed Himself in Jesus through the various miracles, wonders and signs, Acts 2:22, but when the time of miracles, wonders and signs had ceased, He revealed it and continues to reveal His heart's desire for us through His word, Romans 10:17 / James 2:18.

Jesus has revealed the way to the Father because He is the Way, John 14:6, and what we call the Bible is God's complete revelation of Himself to mankind, Hebrews 1:1-2 / Jude 3.

It's not enough just to seek the Lord to guide our hearts; we need to ask Him to and allow Him to direct our lives out of love for Him, just like David of old did when he prayed for Israel and Solomon, 1 Chronicles 29:18-19. Just like Solomon of old did when he prayed for himself and Israel, 1 Kings 8:57-58, and we as Christians today absolutely need God's help when we desire to do what is right and good, Philippians 2:13.

What kind of love has God shown the church in Thessalonica? 1 Thessalonians 4:9 / 2 Thessalonians 1:4. The kind of love that God demonstrated through Jesus, 1 John 4:9-11 / 1 John 3:16-19. The kind of love that Jesus demonstrated to the world, Hebrews 12:1-3 / 1 Peter 2:21-23.

Not only was Paul's prayer for the Lord to direct their hearts into God's love, but he also wanted the Lord to direct their hearts into the patience of Christ, 2 Thessalonians 3:5 / 2 Peter 1:5-6.

When we read the Old Testament, we read time and time again that the Christ is coming, Matthew through to John declares that the Christ is here, Acts through to Revelation declares that Christ is coming again. We have already

established that no one knows when the Lord will return, but we do know that He will. In the meantime, we need to be patient, **Philippians 3:20**.

WARNING AGAINST IDLENESS

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.” We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good. Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.” **2 Thessalonians 3:6-15**

What the apostle Paul is about to write about next is a topic that many churches like to stay away from as much as possible: the topic of church discipline. He introduces this topic by telling the church in Thessalonica that what he’s about to write isn’t by his own authority but by the authority of the Lord Jesus Himself, **2 Thessalonians 3:6 / Matthew 28:18 / Colossians 3:17**.

Mason, in his commentary, says the following.

‘To do anything in a person’s name seems to mean, in the first instance, the actual pronouncing of the name in the performance of the action, to do it ‘name on lip.’ Thus, miracles were said to be performed ‘in the name of the Lord,’ that is, with audible repetition of the Lord’s name.’

There is no getting away from the strong language, which is used here, which again tells us that Paul isn’t giving them a suggestion but a command. He says the Lord commands them, ‘to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us,’ **2 Thessalonians 3:6**.

The King James Version says, ‘Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.’

The Greek word for ‘withdraw’ is the word ‘stello’, which basically means ‘do not associate with’. The word disorderly is the Greek word ‘ataktos’, and it carries with it the meaning of ‘being out of rank’, as a military term.

The apostles had shown them the proper example for them to follow whilst they were amongst them, an example which was pleasing to God, **2 Thessalonians 3:7**. They weren’t ‘out of rank’ but lived how they were supposed to live according to their calling, **Philippians 1:27 / Ephesians 4:1**.

When they were with the saints in Thessalonica, they supported themselves by working. Why? In order that they wouldn’t be open to a charge of being lazy, the apostles wanted to show them a good example, **2 Thessalonians 3:7-8 / 1 Corinthians 11:1**.

They didn’t have to do this because, as preachers of the Gospel, it was proper for them to receive some support from their brethren to further the Gospel, **Deuteronomy 25:4 / 1 Corinthians 9:1-15 / 1 Timothy 5:18**, but they chose not to burden the church at this point because the lesson in working needed to be learned by some brethren in Thessalonica. When the apostles were among them, they gave the church this rule, ‘The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat,’ **2 Thessalonians 3:10 / Genesis 2:15 / Genesis 3:19 / Ephesians 4:28 / Romans 12:11**. The apostles heard that

some brethren were ‘out of rank’. Now, remember that Paul has already written to them about this in his first letter, **1 Thessalonians 5:14**.

And so it seems that there were some who didn’t listen to him, and so here he adds a deeper authority to it. Some were disruptive and not working at all, not busy but busybodies, **2 Thessalonians 3:11**.

Although it doesn’t come across very well in our English translations of the Bible, the apostle Paul seems to be making a play on words here. The word ‘ergazomai’ is the Greek word for working, and ‘periergazomai’ is the Greek word for a busybody.

Paul is saying that some brethren are going around the work as if they were actually dodging doing any work at all. They are working but working at being busy in things which are useless and almost pointless, interfering with other people’s affairs, etc., today we would say they would be busy ‘majoring in the minors’, **1 Timothy 5:13**.

These people are commanded and encouraged by the Lord to work quietly, be satisfied and earn their food, **2 Thessalonians 3:12 / 1 Thessalonians 4:11**. The church is commanded not to become tired of doing what is good, **2 Thessalonians 3:13 / Galatians 6:9-10 / Matthew 10:22**.

Notice again the strong tone of **2 Thessalonians 3:14-15**, obedience to the Word of God is always of the utmost importance, if someone doesn’t listen to what has been said, the church was to ‘take special note of them,’ **2 Thessalonians 3:6**, and notice of the purpose in not associating with anyone who won’t listen to these commands, ‘that he may feel ashamed’, **Jeremiah 3:25**.

However, and this is an important point, they were not to be seen as an enemy but to be warned as they would a fellow believer, **2 Thessalonians 3:15**.

Kelcy, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This shows that Paul does not expect the faithful Christians to refuse to have any sort of contact with the disorderly. This word ‘admonish’ is a brotherly word, used in the New Testament only by Paul in **Acts 20:31 / 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 / Romans 15:14 / Colossians 3:16**, and in this text.’

And with what attitude was this to be done? **Leviticus 19:17 / Galatians 6:1 / 1 Peter 4:8 / James 5:19-20 / Revelation 3:19**. In summary, as Paul nears the end of his second letter, he gives the church in Thessalonica a series charge, to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition received from Paul, **2 Thessalonians 3:6 / 2 Thessalonians 3:14**.

The seriousness of the charge is seen in that Paul invokes the name of Jesus, **2 Thessalonians 3:6**, which is something he rarely does, **1 Corinthians 1:10**. The circumstances at Thessalonica that prompted such a serious charge were simply that some Christians had quit working, and had become busybodies, **2 Thessalonians 3:11-12**, which was the opposite of the apostle’s own example and previous commands, **2 Thessalonians 3:7-10**.

It is possible that some Christians were so excited about the Lord’s return, and they thought it was more or less coming that day, that they didn’t see the need to work anymore. Nonetheless, they are commanded to work, and if they refused to work to earn their own keep, they were to have fellowship withdrawn from them, **2 Thessalonians 3:14 / 2 Thessalonians 3:6**.

I mentioned at the start of this section that many churches like to stay away from church discipline, and this could be for several reasons, but I believe it would be useful to spend a few moments discussing the topic at this point.

I’ve heard of people being disfellowshipped because they never get to worship on time. I’ve heard of people being disfellowshipped because they didn’t agree with the preacher.

Disfellowshipping is all about preserving the purity of the church. The Hebrew writer reminds us that Christians must follow after holiness in **Hebrews 12:14**. **1 John 4:6-13** reminds us that Christians must love one another.

Ephesians 4:3 reminds us that Christians must live in the bond of peace with each other. And so the church must strive for these things and be on our guard against anything which will influence our goals.

And so if we're going to preserve the purity of the church, we need to be on our guard against things like false doctrine, division, strife and impurity. Because the ultimate goal of the church is the salvation of souls, **Philippians 2:12-13**. Yes, dis-fellowshipping someone is never a pleasant experience, but there are times when it needs to be done because their soul is at stake.

But what would constitute reasons for being disfellowshipped? There are at least six examples within the New Testament, but that doesn't mean they are the only reasons. Sometimes there are principles set out within those six examples.

The first example we find within the New Testament is a passage that everyone is pretty familiar with, **Matthew 18:15-17**. Here, Jesus gives the example that a person may end up being disfellowshipped if they have malice against a fellow Christian, which doesn't get solved.

The second example is found in **Romans 16:17**, where Paul tells us that a person who causes division and doesn't stop may end up being disfellowshipped. The third example is found in **1 Corinthians 5:1-13**, which deals with the topic of immorality. We see a man who was living immorally; basically, he was having sexual relations with his father's wife, and so he had to be disfellowshipped from the church in Corinth.

The fourth example is found in **2 Thessalonians 2:6**. Walking in rebellion basically means walking out of step, and if we keep it in its context, we see that it is applied to those who are lazy gossipers.

The fifth example is found in **1 Timothy 1:20**, where the apostle Paul tells us that Hymenaeus and Alexander were disfellowshipped for blasphemy. And finally, the sixth example is found in **Acts 20:30**, and so anyone who teaches false doctrine may eventually be disfellowshipped.

Now, those are just six examples, but please don't think they are the only reasons for someone being disfellowshipped, as I said, there are principles within those examples.

How we go about the process of dis-fellowshipping someone must be Scriptural because the manner of carrying out a matter often determines its effect. And so very often Scriptural discipline becomes unscriptural because it's carried out in an unscriptural manner.

We need to have the right motives for carrying out our actions, for example, in personal grievances, the object should be to gain a brother back, as **Matthew 18:15** tells us.

IN PUBLIC GRIEVANCES

The motive should be to restore the Christian gently, **Galatians 6:1** / **James 5:19-20**. But in all cases, the motive should be edification, not destruction, **Luke 9:51-56**. And so disfellowshipping must be carried out with the right motives, but also in a spirit of love, **Colossians 3:13**.

Now, when I said that it needs to be carried out Scripturally, I mean it needs to be carried out strictly according to the teachings we find within the New Testament. Again, in public grievances, Paul says that the offender should be properly warned first in **1 Thessalonians 5:14**. And according to **Titus 3:10**, the offender must be rebuked at least twice.

IN PRIVATE GRIEVANCES

If the offender thinks they have committed an offence against another, they must go and rectify it, according to **Matthew 5:23-24**. In **Matthew 18:15-17**, Jesus reminds us that the offended one must go to the offender; if he will not listen, he is to take witnesses, if this is not effective, he must take it to the church.

In other words, it then becomes a public matter, and if the offender does not listen to the church, then they must be disfellowshipped, **1 Corinthians 5:4-5**. Everything needs to be carried out scripturally, with the right motives, but the whole church must be involved with this decision.

Think about the effects of disfellowshipping someone, because they are far-reaching. **Matthew 18:17** tells us that they are to be treated as a heathen man and a publican. **Romans 16:17** tells us that they are to be avoided.

1 Corinthians 5:2 tells us that they are to be taken out of the assembly. **1 Corinthians 5:11** and **2 Thessalonians 3:14** tell us that we can't keep company or even eat with them. **2 John 9-11** tells us that we shouldn't assist them in any way.

But every member of the church has to treat them the same way. Why? Because the Bible says so, and we cannot and must not give them any hint that we are approving of their actions.

But what's the point of dis-fellowshipping, someone? I know people who have received letters informing them that they have been disfellowshipped from the church, and they haven't even been in a meeting of the Lord's church for five years.

There is a huge difference between someone living sinfully, causing strife in the church and someone who just simply doesn't come anymore. We cannot treat them with some sort of self-righteousness or malice; the motive behind it is found in **2 Thessalonians 3:14-15**.

Paul says the motivation behind disfellowshipping someone is simply to make the offender ashamed, but with the hope of bringing them more rapidly to repentance. But at all times, and notice this, Paul says, we have to remember they are not our enemy, **2 Thessalonians 3:15**.

Disciplining someone through means of disfellowshipping is not the end goal; restoration is the end goal. And what a joyous occasion that is when someone who has been disfellowshipped returns to the fold. Don't the angels in heaven rejoice when a sinner repents? **Luke 15:10**.

When the apostle Paul writes his second letter to the church in Corinth about the man who was disfellowshipped, we get an insight into the church's reaction when someone returns.

When a person returns to the fold, there are to be no grudges or self-righteousness, just simply forgiveness and love, **2 Corinthians 2:7-8**. Because if we don't, then Satan will have a field day, not only with those who have returned but also with the church as a whole, **2 Corinthians 2:10-11**.

A person is not dis-fellowshipped forever; it's not an eternal sentence, they need to go and realise what they have done as being wrong. And when they come to that realisation, they can repent and return, and they will be saved, **2 Corinthians 2:10-11**.

FINAL GREETINGS

"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." **2 Thessalonians 3:16-18**

As we come to the apostle's final remarks, we need to remind ourselves that this second letter to the Thessalonian saints was designed to encourage them amid the persecution they were facing, **2 Thessalonians 1:1-12**. To give them

enlightenment concerning the Lord's return, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17, and also to urge them to live right for Christ, 2 Thessalonians 3:1-15.

And as was the custom of Paul he ends this letter with a blessing and a prayer for the church, 2 Thessalonians 3:16. One can only imagine amid persecution the need for peace, but this is not the kind of peace which the world thinks of in terms of everyone getting along great together or no more wars, but the kind of inner peace we can have with God, Romans 5:1, and our fellow man, 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

This is the kind of peace which was prophesied and that Jesus would guide us into, Luke 1:78-79 / Luke 2:14, the same peace with Christ came preaching, Acts 10:36, the kind of peace that the world cannot offer or give, John 14:27. A peace that wins despite tribulation, John 16:33 and peace which rules the Lord's kingdom, Romans 14:17, in which everyone can be a part, Ephesians 2:14-18.

And how was this peace made possible? Through the death of Jesus on the cross, Ephesians 2:15-16 / Colossians 1:20-22. But it must be pursued by all Christians, Romans 14:19 / 2 Timothy 2:22 / Hebrews 12:14 / 1 Peter 3:10-11. In 2 Thessalonians 3:17, we find that Paul makes a brief reference to writing in his own hand.

G. K. Beale makes the following comments on this verse.

'When we write letters, we typically conclude with a standard 'sincerely' or 'best wishes', then sign our names without thinking. Not so with Paul. Just as the concluding 'peace' in 2 Thessalonians 3:16 is not an unconscious part of a standard farewell, so it is with the closing greeting.'

Paul does not merely greet them but points out the usual manner of his greeting, 2 Thessalonians 3:17. There is something unusual in the way Paul writes his name; sometimes he uses 'large letters', Galatians 6:11.

Some say that Paul draws attention to his signature because a secretary has written the letter, and Paul wants to make sure that the recipients clearly understand that the epistle is from him and not the secretary. But there seems to be more significance attached to his comment in 2 Thessalonians 3:17 than merely his use of secretarial assistance.

Paul has already used the word 'epistle' three times, once to refer to his genuine first letter to the Thessalonians as a correction to the earlier-mentioned spurious letter, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, and once to refer to his genuine second letter also as a correction of false teaching and its correlate disorderly lifestyle, 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

Plausibly, this final occurrence of 'epistle' and Paul's distinguishing signature on it has similar significance. He signs his letters in order to authenticate them and their teaching in contrast to fraudulent letters attributed to him, including the pseudo letter mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:2.

This suggests further that he still has the false teaching of 2 Thessalonians 2:2-12 in mind, not only in 2 Thessalonians 3:17, but throughout the entire chapter. The only other epistles where he expressly mentions his signature are ones where he is writing in opposition to false teachers, 1 Corinthians 16:21 / Galatians 6:11 / Colossians 4:18.

His qualification that the distinguishing mark of his signature is attached to all his letters and that he always writes in this manner indicates that the danger of circulating spurious Pauline epistles and the attendant false teaching was more widespread than merely these instances. (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. 1-2 Thessalonians. G. K. Beale. Pages 268 and 269)

The apostle ends his second letter with a prayer blessing of grace, 2 Thessalonians 3:18. That unmerited favour from the Lord Himself. Just like peace, grace was also prophesied concerning what would be coming with Jesus, 1 Peter 1:10-11. We know that Jesus came full of grace, John 1:14 / John 1:16-17.

We also know that His apostles preached the Gospel of grace, Acts 20:24 / Acts 20:32. As Christians, we stand in God's grace, Romans 5:2 / 1 Peter 5:12, and as we saw earlier in this study, Christians have everlasting comfort and hope through God's grace, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17.

But how did we receive that grace in the first place? Simply by obeying the Gospel of grace, Hebrews 5:9. We received that grace at our baptism, Titus 3:4-7 / Mark 16:15-16 / Acts 2:36 / Acts 22:16, and by continuing to obey the doctrine which was given to us, which sets us free from sin, Romans 6:17.

We are commanded to grow in that grace, 2 Peter 3:18, and this same grace is multiplied as we grow in the knowledge of Jesus, 2 Peter 1:2 / 2 Peter 1:5-8. God will continue to give us grace when we ask for it, Hebrews 4:14-16 / James 4:6 / 1 Peter 5:5.

But remember, as Christians, we can lose that grace, we can fall from grace, 2 Peter 2:20-22. The Apostle Paul's love for his brothers and sisters in Christ in Thessalonica was very evident. He wanted the Lord Himself to give them peace always and in every way.

He wanted the grace of the Lord to be with them all always and in every way. And so, just like he began this second letter to the church in Thessalonica, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, he closes the letter with the same blessings and prayer of peace and grace, 2 Thessalonians 3:18.

Hayes, in his commentary, says the following.

1. The word 'law' does not occur in either of the Thessalonian letters.
2. The cross is not mentioned in the epistle, and the death of Christ is mentioned but once.
3. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6 / 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, is the first mention of church discipline in the New Testament.
4. The language of 2 Thessalonians 3:17, 'every epistle,' seems to indicate a number of genuine epistles, and as there are in the New Testament only one or two known prior epistles, the conclusion could be that Paul's correspondence was much larger than that which we now possess.