

2 THESSALONIANS

Living in Hope of Jesus' Return

Introduction

- Not long after writing 1 Thess (AD 50-51), Paul received a report that the problems he addressed have gotten worse (3:11)
 - Persecutions have intensified
 - Believers were confused and scared about the return of Jesus
- 2 Thess is divided into three main sections, addressing three problems
 - Paul commends the church for enduring persecution (1:4-12)
 - Paul addresses a false claim regarding the Day of the Lord (2:1-17)
 - Paul instructs the church to challenge idle believers (3:1-15)
- The end of these sections are marked by a closing prayer

Opening Prayer

- Paul begins with a thanksgiving prayer for their faithfulness and endurance (vv. 1-3)
- **1** Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: **2** Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **3** 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.
- He commends the church for their endurance and reminds them that their suffering is a way of participating in God's kingdom (1:4-12)

Commendation for Endurance

- ⁴Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.
- ⁵All 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. ⁶God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷and 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. ⁸He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might ¹⁰on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

Commendation for Endurance

- Jesus was inaugurated as king by his suffering on the cross
- As a result, we show our victory by imitating Jesus' non-violent and patient endurance over the world, because the suffering won't last forever
- When Jesus returns, he will bring his justice to bear on those who have oppressed them (vv. 6-7)
- Those who reject Jesus will be punished (v. 8), and separated from the presence of God, which is the ultimate form of destruction (v. 9)
- Finally, Paul prays for them that God would use their suffering to bring about deep transformation in their living (1:11-12)

First Closing Prayer

- ¹¹ 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. ¹² We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Clarifying Christ's Second Coming

- Apparently, someone in the congregation spread wrong information in Paul's name, saying God's final justice on evil (the Day of the Lord) has come upon them (2:1-2)
- Paul said in 1 Thess 5:2 that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night," so they should be ready and not be surprised (5:4-6)
- This caused anxiety among the people and some predicted dates of his coming. Perhaps, he has already come and they were left behind (2 Thess 2:2)
- In 2 Thess 2:3-4, Paul alludes to Isaiah (13-14) and Daniel (7-12) that the kingdoms of this world will continue to produce rulers who rebel against God, like Nebuchadnezzar and the King of the North did in the past
- Paul saw these patterns repeated in the Roman emperors Caligula (AD 37-41) and Nero (AD 54-68)
- Jesus will not return until a rebellious ruler, powered by evil, who will wreak havoc on God's world (2:3-4)

Clarifying Christ's Second Coming

- **1** Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, **2**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. **3**Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. **4**He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.
- **5**Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? **6**And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. **7**For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. **8**And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. **9**The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, **10**and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. **11**For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie **12**and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2:1-17)

Clarifying Christ's Second Coming

- Paul clarifies that certain events must precede Jesus' return, including a vast rebellion against God and the revealing of the rebellious ruler (2:3-12; cf. Mk 13)
- This rebellion will be religious in nature, involving revolt against general laws and the morals of society (e.g., the holocaust)
- The rebellious ruler is not Satan (v. 9), but is identified with the anti-Christ (1 Jn 2:18, 22; cf. Isa 14:12-14; Dan 6:7)
- The power of evil is already at work, but is being held back by a restrainer (perhaps Michael the patron angel of God's people cf. Dan 10-12)
- In other words, Paul's teaching is not meant to fuel apocalyptic speculation on *when* Christ returns
- They need not be scared but stay faithful and stand firm until Jesus returns (2:13-14)

Second Closing Prayer

- In 2:16-17, Paul asks Jesus and the Father to strengthen them and to remain faithful to the way of Jesus
- ¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Addressing the Idle Ones

- Finally, in 3:6-15, Paul addresses the idle ones—those who were not lazy but refused to work (cf. 1 Thess 4:10-12; 5:14)
- It's not certain why they were idle. Maybe they thought Jesus would return soon, so they quit working and dropped out of normal life
- Likely Paul was referring to “Roman Patronage,” an arrangement, where poor people worked for wealthy people, who sometimes required the poor to involve in immoral ways of life
- Paul instructs them to follow his example in that he didn't ask for their money when he was with them. He worked a regular job so he could help other free of charge (3:7-8)

Addressing the Idle Ones

- ⁶In 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. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, ⁸nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹We 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. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."
- ¹¹We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹²Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. ¹³And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good.
- ¹⁴Take 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. ¹⁵Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.

Third Closing Prayer

- In his final prayer (3:16-18), Paul asks that in the midst of their confusion God would grant them peace
- ¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. ¹⁷ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.
¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Conclusion

- Belief in Jesus' return and hope for final justice was not meant to generate speculations about apocalyptic timelines
- Rather, the anticipation of Jesus' return brought hope and inspired faithfulness, especially for persecuted Christians facing violent opposition
- God will preserve his people until their final salvation (2:13-14)
- God is ultimately in control of his creation and gives protecting power over his people
- The message of 2 Thessalonians for the succeeding generations of Christian is that what we hope for shapes what we live for