

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE 2 THESSALONIANS

January 9, 2019

Answers to Lesson 36– 1 Thessalonians

Historical Setting

Acts 17 provides the historical background for 1 and 2 Thessalonians. With a population of about two hundred thousand, Thessalonica was the capitol and largest city in the province of Macedonia. It was an important communication and trade center.

After leaving Philippi, Paul and Silas (and possibly Timothy) arrived in the city and preached on three successive Sabbaths in the synagogue. As a result, some of the Jews became Christians as did a large number of God-fearing Gentiles. But opposition arose quickly from the Jews.

His purpose in writing the letter was 1) to thank the new converts for the encouragement they provided for Paul and 2) to offer a defense of his ministry in answer to those who had been slandering the apostle and 3) to give them encouragement in the face of continued persecution and 4) to correct some misunderstandings that had arisen in regard to his previous teachings on the second coming of Christ.

Three Marks of True Conversion

- 1) People repented and put off the old patterns of life (turned to God and away from idols).
- 2) They replaced the old life with wholehearted service (served the living and true God).
- 3) They looked forward to the hope of Christ's return (believed his return would be imminent).

Accusations Made Against Paul

The opponents insinuated that Paul had no genuine concern for the Thessalonians because he did not return to them immediately. They told the new converts that his only concern was self-gratification. They said his message was of his own design and it was not from the Lord.

If the opponents could prove that the conduct of Paul was dishonorable then they could effectively discourage the new believers who held Paul in such high esteem.

Tone of His Ministry

It was based on the Word of God.

Paul spoke as one approved by God and entrusted with the gospel.

It was prompted by a love for people.

Paul was not motivated by greed but by genuine concern for the people.

Paul likened his ministry to the relationships of both father and mother with children.

It was reinforced by purity of lifestyle.

Paul practiced what he preached. Paul worked hard among them and was devoted to the Lord.

It was rewarded by evidence of faith and growth.

His reward was the fruitfulness of his labors, seeing others grow and mature in their faith.

Sanctification

The word means *set apart* or *made holy*. It is a word found throughout the Old Testament. In the book of Leviticus the people of God were expected to be separate, clean and holy. Even objects could be sanctified in the sense that they were separated for God's use alone. We are also to be set apart for God's use. We are to be separate in our lifestyle from the world around us. We are to be clean. Paul uses sexual immorality as an example to differentiate the two.

Evidence of the Sanctified Life

The most notable evidence of the sanctified life is love. Paul commends the Thessalonians for their genuine love for one another and for all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia.

Second Coming of Christ

Many assumed that Christ would return immediately and in their lifetime. They thought that they would all remain alive until Christ returned. But when some of the people died they questioned whether the rest of them would have a part in that great day. Paul answered their questions by asserting that God would bring with Jesus those who had fallen asleep in him.

Expectation of Christ's Return

Paul encouraged them to be alert and self-controlled. They were not supposed to sit around and wait until Christ returned or until they died. They were to live a life of holiness. They were to live together with Christ in the present moment, allowing their righteousness to fill and rule their lives.



The followers of Paul continued to have a general concern for the stability of the church. There was mounting hostility from its neighbor. Author crafts this letter to encourage the believers not to veer from the truth or traditions of Paul.

2 Thessalonians 1

Opening verses (vs. 1-2) are almost verbatim the greeting offered in 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2. Verse 4 reveals a community undergoing stressful persecutions and afflictions. Discussion on the judgment at Christ's coming suggests a later time period than the first letter. It is assumed that Paul had already died and a disciple of Paul penned this letter in his name. People are not to grow weary in the midst of the struggles but to keep doing good works.

Following the format of letters, the chapter opens with words of thanksgiving. However, here we see that the author makes the message of gratitude an obligation, a duty. *We must always give thanks* is bound by the characteristic marks of faith and love. It is always the right time for words of thanksgiving for a Christian community . . .
whose faith grows abundantly
whose love towards one another continues to increase

The author reminds us of several aspects about thanksgiving. In the Christian community it is somewhat counter-intuitive. When times are good one easily forgets the gifts of God that create and sustain life. When times are bad it is difficult to make a list of things for which one should be thankful. But thanksgiving is not a private matter. It is founded and sustained by life in the community. It is the mutual interplay of faith in the grace of God and the power of the acts of love to others.

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.
2 Thessalonians 1:3



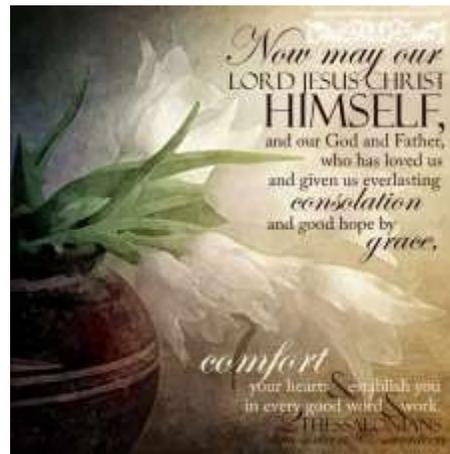
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The author surrounded and encouraged this community with his love. He complements them for their steadfastness in the midst of intense persecutions and sufferings. He knows they are at risk of giving up their faith or losing energy to love and care for neighbors. Instead of retreating, he openly boasts about their good works. He supports them as they actively engage in the obligations of faith and love.

To that end, Paul and the others prayed for the Thessalonians. His words speak of a confidence in God's care for them that cannot be taken for granted. Paul believes God has a deep concern for what happens in the world. Paul was not naïve about the situation the Thessalonians faced. People will be sustained by the power of God and God will help them bear fruit. Such works depend on resolve and faith and that is not to be taken for granted either. It is a gift of God and is in response to prayer that is sustained within the community of faith.

Such resolve and good works are not ends in themselves. Name of Christ is glorified and Christ gives glory to the community that bears his name. Grace and peace begin this letter and grace marks the conclusion of the opening chapter. It underscores that the Christian community and life are framed by the grace and love of God.

Verses 5-10 speak of the uncomfortable and troublesome theme of judgment. The author speaks of their current afflictions as part of God's righteous intention. *On that day* those who persecute the righteous will in the end be punished. The unrighteous do not *know* God and do not *obey* the gospel of Jesus Christ. As I mentioned earlier, this section on judgment is what points to an author that is not Paul. Viewpoint is that of those who belong to a later period of the early church.



2 Thessalonians 2

Note of thanksgiving in the last chapter turns (in contrast) to an appeal in Chapter 2. Occasion of the letter now becomes clear.

Author mentions the two key bases of the confidence he hopes to instill in the people:

- Sure and certain coming of the Lord Jesus Christ

- Conviction that with *his coming* they will be gathered together with him

These two convictions are meant to help the Christians let go of the false rumors.

At the same time it will offer the people the comfort and empowering truth of the gospel.

Author then returns to address the false rumors that have suddenly arisen.

A spirit developed that caused heated emotions and fears that magnified as they spread.

Certain people were stirring up the community.

Substance of the rumor concerned a false report that the *day of the Lord* had already come.

People believed they somehow missed it or were left behind.

Paul made his case in as forceful and direct way as possible as outlined in verse 3.

People were being deceived and (in the Greek) the rumors were to stop immediately.

Paul was banking on his authority as an apostle but he also offered some rationale.

It was impossible for the *day* to have come because the *rebellion* did not take place.

And the *lawless one* was not revealed.

Unsure of its meaning or identity the *lawless one* was an enemy of God.

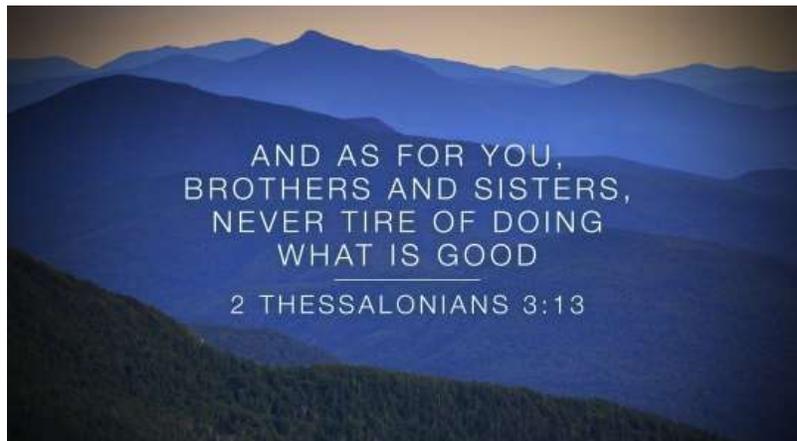
Lawless one took upon himself the very role of God.

Paul offers one final basis for his appeal (not as an order but as a pleading and personal appeal). He invites the Thessalonians to recall his ministry and his time with them. Hearing the gospel and getting it right depends on the personal experience of the community. It is to that experience that the second portion of the chapter addresses. In the first part there is a call for a *cease and desist* in the matters of false rumors. Now Paul asserts an alternative, positive and foundational confidence in the power of the gospel. Gospel must displace any false rumors and occupy the spirit and mind of the community.

2:13 mirrors the words of thanksgiving in 1:3.

Major addition is a word of thanksgiving for *you* – who are beloved of the Lord. Whatever rumors were out there the one thing they needed to remember was they were beloved. Based on the Greek this love was a done deal, established firmly, and not to be undone. And this confidence is clearly stated because God chose them for salvation as first fruits. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 it was those who died who would be first in line at his coming. Now it is these living Thessalonians who hear for themselves that same assurance.

The two marks of this *salvation* in the community are holiness and faith. Salvation is not just a matter of hope in a future coming. People are to dig into their experience and note the confirming signs of that salvation. They were to look around them to see how they have lived in a holiness marked by the Spirit. Faith and trust will enable them to live by the truth. False rumors will tempt them away from the certain hope to those who belong to God. Gospel asserts the purpose of God and in salvation they will be united in glory with Christ. People were to stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that they were taught.



With Chapter 3 Paul begins to bring this epistle to a close. In a masterful way the author demonstrates that his confidence does not lay in human plans. His confidence is in the Lord himself. Whatever they might need or face was matched by an unending trust in the faithfulness of God. As in 1 Thessalonians 5:25, Paul asks for prayers on behalf of his ministry team.

Content of the prayer was spelled out in two specific requests.
They did not ask for prayers in general but were specific with their requests.
First request was for the message of the Lord to proceed quickly while it was also to be glorified.
In the second request Paul asked that they be delivered from perverse and evil men.
Word of God was not to be bound or imprisoned.
Satan was impotent against the Word when it was proclaimed accurately.

Paul assures the people that the Lord will strengthen them and protect them from the evil one.
Paul had confidence the people would continue to do the things he had commanded them.
Key to his confidence is seen in the words – in the Lord.
His confidence was rooted in the Lord.
Paul trusted the faithful God to be at work to maintain them in growth and obedience.
Yet they were not to take the Lord for granted.
He invited the Lord to direct their hearts.

Closing sentences of the chapter sum up his ethic: Do not be weary in doing what is right.
He calls on the Thessalonians to do whatever good they can, whenever they can.
They were to live with others in equity and mutual accountability.
They were summoned to a life of mutual effort for mutual service.
His plea was based on equal regard for the other.
Everything about their lives was qualified by the reality that they were redeemed in the Lord.
They were workers in the kingdom of God.
God gifted them to contribute for the good of all.
In the Lord Jesus they owed one another their best efforts.

Assignment for January 16

Complete the Exercises from Lesson 37 on Pages 193-196
Read *1 Timothy* or the portions outlined on Page 196

