

2 THESSALONIANS

INTRODUCTION

Regarding the Pauline authorship and apostolic authority of 2 Thessalonians, there is no doubt whatever.

The emphasis in 1 Thessalonians was upon joy and love and in 2 Thessalonians it emphasizes the wrath and judgment of God. However, there is a great deal of love, mercy and longsuffering kindness in 2 Thessalonians. Rollin Hough Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 2969, said, "If 1 Thessalonians was not before us, it would be the tenderness of Paul's treatment of the church which would most impress us in 2 Thessalonians."

In the notes on this epistle an interpretation of Paul's "man of sin" will be presented. All that is said in the introduction to the first epistle is also applicable here, with this distinction the second letter was written a short while after the first had not fully corrected all of the disorders to which it was directed.

An approximate date of writing is indicated by the writings as 51 A.D. or early 52 A. D.

CHAPTER 1

This chapter has Paul's salutation (verse 1) and thanksgiving for the Thessalonians because of the manner of their acceptance of the gospel (Verses 2-11).

Verse 1

"Paul, Silvanus and Timothy . . ." As the Thessalonian church was constituted largely of Gentiles, there had been no contradiction of his apostolic authority; and whatever slanders had been leveled against him had "risen over Paul's character." (James Moffatt, *The Expositor's Greek New Testament Vol. IV*, p. 23)

Paul's true character was of such noble quality that it formed the natural foundation of his moral and religious authority without any appeal to the apostolic office which was rightfully his.

Peter E. Cousins, *New Testament Commentary*, p. 492, wrote, “Silvanus . . .” is “the Latin form of Silas.” This was the man chosen by Paul following the dispute with Barnabas over taking John Mark on the second missionary tour. (Acts 15:40)

Paul’s mention of him here, ahead of Timothy, was appropriate because of the share Silas had in the conversion of the Thessalonians; also, Silas had been chosen somewhat before Timothy was enlisted at Lystra.

“Timothy . . .” Neither, Timothy nor Silas may be understood in any sense as co-authors of this letter. The mention of these two faithful workers was simply a matter of friendship and courtesy on the part of the apostle.

“In God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ . . .” The oneness of the Father and the Son, the deity of Christ as well as the whole doctrine of the incarnation are securely anchored in a text like this. As Cousins *Ibid.*, said, “Here, incidentally, is a powerful witness of the faith of the primitive church in the full deity of the Son.”

“In God . . .” Just as human beings live in the atmosphere and at the same time the atmosphere is in them, just so the spiritual life of Christians is “in God” and “in Christ,” both God and Christ also being likewise in them.

Verse 2

David a. Hubbard, *Wycliffe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, p. 806, expressed it, “God’s act of unmerited favor in Christ (grace) brings in its wake complete Spiritual welfare (peace).”

“Lord Jesus Christ . . .” “Lord” means sovereign, ruler, authority, head and chief, fully entitled to adoration, honor and worship of all Creation.

“Jesus” is the name bestowed by the archangel before Christ was born. Christ is the Greek form of “anointed,” meaning Messiah, Son of David, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

Verse 3

Thanksgiving was most remarkably an overwhelming characteristic of the great apostle's love and appreciation of the churches which God had enabled him to establish.

Paul always had room for outpouring his gratitude to God upon their behalf. This is even more noteworthy in view of the seriousness of some of their sins and mistakes.

"We are bound to give thanks . . ." Paul was saying, "In all fairness, I could not fail to praise you." Of course, it may not be denied that some at Thessalonica were not living right: but as William Hendriksen, *A New Testament Commentary, 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, p. 113, said, "In the jubilant passage we are now discussing, the disorderly persons are kept in the background for the moment."

"Your faith is greatly enlarged . . ." Ronald A. Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 137, pointed out that Paul loved to coin words with super-superlative meanings; "grows ever greater," is another instance of it. "We are super-conquerors (Romans 8:37); God super-exalted His Son (Philippians 2:9); and, of course, there is the case of the super-apostles in Corinthians!"

Verse 4

Paul here cited the reason why the Thessalonians were entitled to praise. P. J. Gloag, *Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 21, p. 2*, wrote, "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." David Lipscomb, *Commentary on 2 Thessalonians*, p. 87, pointed out, "It is at all times right and profitable that the vigor and prosperity of a church should be known to all."

Verse 5

"Indication of God's righteous judgment . . ." All the sufferings of God's people inflicted upon them by unbelievers and enemies of righteousness will be vindicated in the righteous judgment of Almighty God.

“Counted worthy . . .” Ronald A. Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 140, wrote, “Paul did not mean that they would be refined by suffering in a kind of earthly purgatory and therefore be able to stand in their own purity at the judgment.”

“Kingdom of God . . .” Paul had specifically stated to them that they were “in Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:1) and no man was ever in Christ without being in the kingdom of God and of Christ. Paul simply meant by this that their fidelity through sufferings would make and prove their worthiness of being in the kingdom.

Verses 6-7

“It is only just . . .” The tribulation of the Thessalonians was a token of God’s judgment upon the enemies of His work; and the “only just” in this verse is not to be construed in any sense as conditional. It is a Hebrew idiomatic way of arguing a certainty.

“Relief . . .” is not a verb but a noun, being the thing that God will recompense to the just, just as affliction will be meted out to the persecutors. Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VI, p. 562, wrote a summary of these two verses, “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.”

“The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven . . .” This identifies the time of receiving the rewards and punishments just mentioned.

“Revealed from heaven . . .” The Scriptures do not always refer to the coming of Christ (Parousia) in the same terminology; here the word is “revealed” or “manifestation.” At other times, reference is made to His “appearing” (2 Timothy 4:1); but it is strongly believed that these variations do not imply different events, but one event only, namely; the coming of the Son of God for judgment in the final day.

The conviction that there is but one “coming” of Christ,” and that it will be for the purpose of the final judgment, stems from the oft-repeated mention of “that day,” always in the singular and never in the plural.

“Relief” . . .” The “relief” in view here is the final rest that remains for the redeemed and which will be theirs only when the Lord has come to reward His saints.

“You who are afflicted . . .” This reference to the sufferings of the Thessalonians focuses upon the problem of human suffering.

SUFFERING

Suffering is ever with us. There is no house that is not invaded, no home that is exempt from it and no life that is untouched by it. (Romans 8:22) “Man is born to trouble as sparks fly upward.” Suffering is everywhere; and that person who is fortunate enough to have little of it in his own personal life is yet scarred and seared by it in the ravishing of loved ones.

I. SUFFERING IS OF MANY KINDS

A. There is retributive suffering in which one’s sins return, in a sense, up on his own head. Lost health and suffering due to godless living is an example, and the savage vengeance of evil men against real or fancied wrongs perpetrated upon them is another.

Adoni-Bezek cut off the thumbs and great toes of seventy kings who groveled for food beneath his table, and then it happened to him. He said, “As I have done, so God has repaid me.” (Judges 1:6-7) Many a sufferer can say the same thing.

B. There is educative suffering, called chastening (Hebrews 12:5-6) which is allowed of God, or even on occasion sent by God, having as its purpose:

- (1) the correction of faults,
- (2) the strengthening of faith and
- (3) the promotion of the soul’s eternal welfare.

The reaction this type of suffering (and in a sense all suffering) is prescribed as follows:

- (1) the child of God must not despise it;
- (2) he should submit to it;

- (3) he must not faint; and
- (4) he should attempt to reap the benefit God intended by it.
- C. There is redemptive, or vicarious suffering. Of this kind were the sorrows of the Master and His agony upon Calvary. There is the type of suffering the willing and voluntary bearing of suffering for the sake of others, and such suffering were the glory of our Lord.
- D. There is suffering that appears to have no rational basis whatever. The innocent, the pure and the godly also suffer; and the pattern of it seems to follow no rationale whatever.

II. WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR SUFFERING?

- A. Our own naive simplicity is one cause of it. When rules of health, physical laws, the nature of human beings and all of the dictates of common sense are violated with impunity, suffering may, and frequently does, follow as a result. In short, such human sorrow and suffering are caused from ordinary stupidity.
- B. The activity of Satan is another cause. Man would do well to look here for the true cause of all human suffering, not merely in the sense of his having introduced and instigated sin into the human race, but also in the sense of being an over-active agent at the present time in promoting sin and rebellion against the laws of God.

The world we live in makes no sense at all unless there is Satan in it, organizing its evil, discouraging its saints, opposing the truth and making every conceivable effort to accomplish the total ruin of humanity.

- C. The sins of others cause suffering in the innocent. The physician under the influence of drugs, the magistrate who takes a bribe, the careless driver, the libertine, the scoffer, the thoughtless and irreligious—all of these and countless others commit sins that result in the sufferings of others.

D. Then there are accidental occurrences, which however cautiously guarded against may yet happen, such as an airplane accident for which no cause can be assigned; and then, suffering.

III. WHAT TO DO ABOUT SUFFERING

- (A) We should not blame God with it, nor lose faith, nor complain as if some unusual thing had happened. It is the grand hallmark of all life on earth.
- (B) On the positive side, one should strive earnestly to accept suffering as Paul was admonished to accept the thorn in the flesh. That there are rich spiritual rewards to be reaped from suffering is a fact well known to all; and when called to suffering, men should be aware of this and turn all the energies of life toward their appropriation.
- (D) Most of all, it should be accepted in faith. There may not be an answer on this earth or in this lifetime. May all men, even in tears, accept whatever of life's sorrows they must, and be assured that there is a city "where there are no tears or pain."
- (E) Finally, let men, when they suffer, remember the sufferings of the Lord. He suffered for us; and, for Him, there were no sedatives, no medicines, no relief.

Contemplating the epic sorrows of the Christ is sufficient to cause nearly any sufferer to see that his sufferings are as nothing compared with the sufferings of Jesus. And while we are about it, may we also be grateful for the ministration of physicians, nurses, hospitals and friends who can and do, do so much to relieve the agony and the sin, and to brace the faithful heart against the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune.

"With His mighty angels . . ." Here is another reason for seeing this as a glimpse of the final judgment. A vast number of angels are usually associated with Christ in the New Testament references to the judgment. (Matthew 13:39, 49)

“In flaming fire . . .” It is positively amazing what diverse views men have taken of this. James Moffatt, *op. cit.*, p. 45, called it, “Hot air of Jewish apocalypse.” Raymond C. Kelcy, *The Letters of Paul to the Thessalonians*, p. 144, construed it as, “The glory and majesty of the coming event.” Adam Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 563, thought it meant, “In thunder and lightning.”

David Lipscomb discerned 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 there 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.)

There is no need to speculate concerning the nature of the “flaming fire” that shall herald the Second Coming, for the Lord has no made it known. Fire there will be.

Verse 8

“Dealing out retribution . . .” Everywhere in Scripture this is the prerogative of Almighty God Himself, not that of any man; and its being ascribed here as a purpose and action of the Lord Jesus Christ is another attestation of His deity.

But retribution there will be. God has a score to settle with sin and with the incorrigibly wicked, and the judgment of the final day is the occasion Divinely appointed to that end.

James Moffatt, *op. cit.*, p. 46, wrote, “The repetition of the article here” indicates two classes of people:

- (1) those who do not know God, and
- (2) those who obey not the gospel. These are usually explained as “the pagans” and the “unbelieving Jews.”

The adverse judgment to be pronounced against them that “know not God,” is the fact of their “refusing to know God.” (Romans 1:20-28) In the second class, it is ridiculous to limit this to, “unbelieving Jews.” It refers with equal power to “unbelievers” of all races and nations, even professing Christians, who refuse to “obey the gospel.” And what does that mean? It means those who refuse to be

baptized into Christ and to assume the duties and obligations incumbent upon all true Christians.

Note: The most concise and shortest definition of the “gospel” in the New Testament is in Mark 16:15-16, where Christ equated being baptized with the “gospel.” There is the prime reason why men have labored early and late to get that verse out of the New Testament.

There is no justification for thus toning down the clear warning of this passage. Failure to obey the gospel of Christ is failure to accept eternal life and may all men heed it.

Verse 9

The reference of this verse is to “hell,” the final destiny of the wicked. There are two facts, universally accepted even in philosophy, to the effect that:

- (1) there is some kind of existence after death of every soul, and
- (2) that God will never finally accommodate to evil, that some judgment of it is certain. Christ and the apostles spoke dogmatically of hell, and the believer in Christ has no alternative to the acceptance of what they said.

William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 160, commented of this saying, “The very fact that “destruction” is “everlasting” shows that it does not amount to annihilation or going out of existence. On the contrary, it denotes an existence “away from the face of the Lord and the glory of His might.”

Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 120, quoted by Morris, commented, “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.”

Verse 10

“When He comes . . .” The Greek word here according to Raymond C. Kelcy, *op. cit.*, p. 146, “Is the aorist subjunctive, a construction indicating the certainty of the event and yet the uncertainty of the time of it,” the same being another

bit of evidence that neither Christ nor any of His apostles expected the coming as a certainty in their day.

There are two purposes of the coming here cited, but these need not be considered as a total list. Paul's use of "come" in this verse shows that the "revelation of Christ," spoken of a moment earlier, is the same as His "coming;" and, therefore, the various references to His revelation, His appearance and His coming all apply to the same event.

The last sentence in this verse is considered difficult by scholars; and Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 121, thought that Lightfoot's paraphrase of it gives the true meaning thus, "The meaning then being . . ." in all them that believed, and therefore in you, for our testimony was believed by you," the testimony borne among the Thessalonians had borne the desired fruit."

"To be marveled at . . ." The full glory of Christ at the time of the Second Advent cannot even be imagined. Adam Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 564, wrote, "Much as true believers may marvel at, and much as they admire the perfections of the Redeemer of mankind, and much as they wonder at His amazing condescension in becoming man, and dying for the sins of the world; all their present amazement and wonder will be as nothing when compared with what they shall feel when they come to see Him in all His glory, the glory that He had with the Father before the world was."

Verse 11

"The work of faith with power . . ." The thought here is that even when Christians do the works required by faith it is actually God who supplies the spiritual energy for them to do it, thus referring all the glory unto God.

Verse 12

"In you and you in Him . . ." The reference to the "work of faith," and the emphasis here upon the indwelling Christ, shows that, although the Second Coming is not out of mind in these verses, nevertheless, Adam Clarke, *Ibid.*, wrote, "The primary emphasis here would seem to be on the quality of life; produced in the Thessalonians by the indwelling Christ."

CHAPTER 2

A warning is given that the Thessalonians should not expect the Second Coming immediately. (verses 1-2) The feature of this chapter is Paul's prophecy of "The man of sin." (verses 3-10) A warning is given to those who take pleasure in wickedness. (verses 11-12) "Give thanks" for the brethren. (verses 13-17)

Verse 1

This outlines the chapter, which regards the Second Coming, an event which the Thessalonians had mistakenly assumed to be "just at hand."

"The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." "Coming" in this verse refers to the final Coming and not to some manifestation of power and grace prior to the Coming.

"Our gathering together to Him . . ." The great feature of the final day will be the uniting of believers with the Lord. 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.

Verse 2

This is Paul's denial that he ever taught that the judgment day was "at hand" in his lifetime. True, some of the Thessalonians had mistakenly understood it that way, but it was their fault by doing so, not Paul's.

"Shaken from your composure . . ." This means, "thrown off the course of sound reasoning and thinking." It is clear enough from this verse that Paul denied having anything whatever to do with creating the false notion in the heads of some of the Thessalonians that they might expect the coming of the Lord at once!

Verse 3

There is nothing here regarding the length of the time interval between the time Paul wrote and the actual coming of Christ in the Second Advent.

The event is still scheduled for a time yet future; and, as the mystery of lawlessness was working then, so it is now; but no man can know how long it will be before the Lord comes.

“The man of lawlessness . . .” He is the same as the “lawless one” in verse 8, with this distinction that “the man of sin” refers to a progressive development of an anti-Christian influence, whereas “the lawless one” is thought by many to refer to some terminal and final embodiment of evil.

The interpretation presented here is that the man of sin has indeed appeared. The man of sin sits in the temple; he exalts himself; he is a false apostle, the son of perdition; names of blasphemy are upon his head; and he is drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus; but his course is not yet run. The final usurpation of the place of God Himself has not yet taken place.

“The son of destruction . . .” Judas is the only other person designated in the New Testament. Just as he was the object of prior prophecy, so is the apostle of apostasy.

Verse 4

This verse is understood as revealing the character of the final lawless one who shall be the culmination of that evil progression, or as marking the true spiritual import of those innovations and corruptions which have been exhibited by the “man of sin.”

“Above every so-called god . . .” A persecutor of the church exalts himself against God in the person of his followers; a perverter of the word of God exalts himself against God in His word.

“Object of worship . . .” This indicates the total atheism and unbounded egotism of the ultimate man of sin.

“Takes his seat in the temple of God . . .” There can be no way that this is a reference to the Jewish temple. Paul, who wrote the Corinthians that, “You are the temple of God,” would never have made that den of thieves and robbers in Jerusalem the “temple of God” historically.

First, it means the church of Jesus Christ; but in context it means the apostate church of Jesus Christ, a deduction that is mandatory from the fact of the apostasy being Paul's subject in this paragraph. Therefore, whenever and wherever the "man of sin" appears it will be in the church apostate!

"Takes his seat . . ." This is a most peculiar verb to be used in such a context: and this writer, who has seen the Pope borne into the Basilica of St. Peter, hoisted above the people and elevated above the high altar upon the shoulders of those who carry him (literally "sitting") into the sanctuary cannot escape the deep impression that a prophecy of that very spectacle is imbedded in this remarkable verb. Who else, ever, in the history of humanity, always entered the church house "sitting," and even taking the Lord's Supper "sitting? Luther was outraged by this and said, "Let the Pope stand up to take the Lord's Supper, like any other stinking sinner."

"Displaying himself as being God . . ." The papacy fulfills this in the blasphemous titles of the supreme pontiff, but there may be more drastic fulfillment of it in the revelation of the terminal "man of sin."

Verse 5

Paul here gives a summary of what he had already taught them. We have all of the information that is necessary.

Verse 6

"What restrains . . ." This is viewed as being the Roman government. This is supported by the context in that it would explain why Paul spoke so guardedly of its "being taken out of the way."

William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 181, wrote, "Of all the theories advanced so far, the one which seems to have most in its favor is that in which the restrainer is "the power of well-ordered human rule," or as Ellicott's Commentary has it, "the principle of legality as opposed to that of lawlessness."

The principle of law and order, as enforced by human authority, is "that which restrains" until he be taken out of the way. This means that Satan will continually use every device, pursue every opportunity, and employ every diabolical in-

strument in his efforts to break down law and order in society. William Hendriksen, *Ibid.* p. 183, wrote, “Hence, for the time being, the worst Satan can do is to promote the spirit of lawlessness. But this does not satisfy him. It is as if he and his man of sin bide their time. At the Divinely decreed moment (at the appropriate time) when, a punishment for man’s willingness to cooperate with this spirit, the “someone” and “something” that now holds back is removed, Satan will begin to carry out his plans.”

Verse 7

In the Greek, the restraining power is spoken of, both as “he” and as “it,” as when a man might speak of the law as “it,” and the enforcer of it as “he.” The Roman government was the principal authority of the age in which Paul wrote; and as long as there was a strong central government in Rome, the spiritual empire of the papists was unable fully to develop. It was with the breakdown of law and order, in the coming of the vandals and hordes of barbarians, that the man of sin saw his opportunity and took it.

Verse 8

The lawless one of this verse is an eschatological (the last things) person, an individual, answering to the Biblical definition of “antichrist;” and, while there seems to be some indication of this, this understanding of it requires understanding the following clauses to contain a double prophecy. The man of sin will be eroded and worn out; the final “lawless one” shall be vanquished instantly in the final advent.”

“The Lord will “slay” with the breath of His mouth . . .” This is an expression found nowhere else in the New Testament. The reference would appear to be to the word of the Lord.

There is also a possible rendition of “slay” as “consume,” as in Adam Clarke’s quotation below, indicating that the power and glory of the man of sin will not perish instantly, but gradually, being continually eroded, wasted away, and “consumed” by the breath of the Lord’s mouth, that is, by His word.

Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VI, p. 567, wrote, “Whom the Lord shall consume . . .” He shall blast him so that he shall wither and die away; and this shall be done by the spirit of his mouth—the words of eternal life, the true doctrine of the gospel of Jesus; this shall be the instrument used to destroy this man of sin; therefore it is evident that his death will not be a sudden one, but a gradual one; because it is by the preaching of the truth that he is to be exposed, overthrown, and finally destroyed.”

“Bring to an end by the appearance of His coming . . .” If the emphasis, as so many insist, is upon the Second Coming, then the fate of antichrist is foretold in it, that same antichrist whom we have identified as the final, terminal and ultimate “man of sin,” being an individual who shall be destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ.

Verse 9

David A. Hubbard, *op. cit.*, p. 834, summarized the meaning saying, “His coming reveals itself in all power (to work miracles) and signs (significant, meaningful miracles) and wonders (amazing their observers). In the Greek, “ly-ing” seems to apply to all three.”

The import of this passage is to the effect that Satan himself will lend his great power to the final man of sin, whom we have supposed to be “antichrist,” and that he will endow this totally wicked and hateful person to exercise even supernatural power in the achievement of his hellish ambitions. Surely this must be the time spoken of in Revelation, when Satan shall be loosed a little season upon the earth. Then will be the times when the “very elect, if possible” shall be deceived, the time when Satan will finally have his way with the earth and its populations—but not for long. As the final rebellion of humanity comes to its awful climax, Satan will be free to accomplish the total destruction of man, the same having been his purpose from the very beginning. But it will only be “for a little season.” The Son of man will suddenly appear the second time apart from sin, to redeem the righteous and to appoint the wicked their portion with the hypocrites.

Verse 10

Populations who will not accept God's morality, but who love evil, will be quite easily deceived by Satan; God Himself will even send hardening and blindness to those who have preferred evil, in order to hasten their destruction.

Verses 11-12

Here again is in view the principle of God's hardening those who love wickedness. People who have pleasure in doing wrong will be blinded and hardened. Thoroughly deceived, they shall then have no difficulty in believing a lie, not the truth. David A Hubbard, *Ibid.*, p. 835, wrote, "Satan's lie consists in getting men to believe him instead of God."

The way of salvation is clear. Those who believe the truth and obey it shall be saved; those who do not believe the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness, shall be finally and irrevocably condemned.

Verse 13

All three members of the godhead are mentioned in this great verse; and it is the answer to the terrible things Paul had just foretold. Whatever evil may engulf the world, the Thessalonians must not be troubled. They are "beloved of the Lord," "chosen of God unto sanctification," and the subject of the apostle's most devout thanksgiving.

Paul had just spoken of a time (at the end) when most people would reject the truth and turn aside to fables; but as William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 186, wrote, "The true believer must never be afraid of belonging to the minority. It is the remnant that shall be saved. All others shall be condemned."

"God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation . . ." God chose all men to be saved, in the sense that every man ever born on earth was destined to be a child of God; but the freedom of human will nullifies that eternal decree in many. God's choosing implies also the believer's having accepted.

Verse 14

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 deter-

mines destiny. All men are called, but only those who hear, accept and obey are the truly “called.”

Verse 15

“Traditions” here does not refer in any manner to human traditions, but to the authentic teachings of the apostles as handed down orally, before the New Testament was available.

Verses 16-17

As so frequently in Paul’s writings, there is here an eloquent inadvertent testimonial witnessing the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. P. J. Gloag, wrote in Pulpit Commentary, expressed it, “Upon an impartial view, one cannot avoid the impression that the points of resemblance between the prophecy and Romanism are numerous, varied and striking. Our forefathers had no doubt as to the application of this prophecy, and perhaps they were nearer to the truth than we in modern times who hesitate.”

CHAPTER 3

Following the prayer which concluded the previous chapter, Paul in this urgently requested that the Thessalonians would continue to pray for him (verses 1-5). Various practical exhortations were then given (verses 6-15), especially with regard to busybodies and idlers. Paul’s autographic attestation and benediction (verses 16-18) conclude the letter.

Verse 1

What a remarkable thing it is that the apostle Paul should continually have felt himself to be in need of the prayers of others. He was about to address his beloved converts regarding some of their shortcomings; and if there was ever a time when a gospel preacher needs the prayers of other on his behalf, it is at such a time. Moreover, it appears that Paul constantly solicited the prayers of his Christian converts.

“Finally . . .” Adam Clarke, Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. VI, p. 574, wrote, “The Greek does not mean finally, but furthermore, to come to a conclu-

sion, what remain is this, I shall only add—any of these phrases expresses the sense of the original.”

“Pray for us . . .” Leon Morris, Tyndale Commentary, Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 140, tells us that the words here are in an emphatic position in the original, thus giving an intensified meaning, “Pray continually, keep on praying (as you are doing); or he may mean. ‘Not only hold fast our teachings’ (2:15), but also pray for us.”

“That the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified . . .” This stresses the living, active and vital nature of the word of God, as well as the burning desire of its proponents to proclaim it.

“And be glorified . . .” does not mean merely to obtain applause, as a successful runner. John Wesley, One Volume Commentary, in loco wrote, “It always implies the recognition or acknowledgement of inherent admirable qualities.”

Paul was the most successful missionary who ever lived; and it could be that the inexhaustible fountain of his success was his sacred well of prayer.

Verse 2

“Perverse and evil men . . .” James Moffatt, The Expositor’s Greek Testament, Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 51, suggested, “That the general aim of this passage is to widen the horizon of the Thessalonians, by enlisting their sympathy and interest on the part of others.” They were not the only ones who needed encouragement and the prayers of fellow-Christians. The characters from whom Paul sought deliverance were doubtless those violent and fanatical opponents who Gallio drove from his judgment seat in Corinth. (Acts 18:12-17)

Their unreasonableness was apparent in the fact of their beating the ruler of the synagogue, it being not clear whether or not he was a member of their own party!

“For not all have faith . . .” Adam Clarke, op. cit., p. 575, told it like it is with this word (*pistis*). He said, “The word here is without doubt to be taken for fidelity, or trustworthiness, and not for faith (in the subjective sense); and this is

agreeable to the meaning given to it in the very next verse: “But the Lord is faithful.”

Verse 3

James Moffatt, *op. cit.*, p. 51, also witnessed to the true meaning of “faith” in this passage as follows, “Paul writes from Corinth that while everyone has the chance, not all have the desire to arrive at the faith (*Pistis* here is the faith of the gospel, or Christianity). By a characteristic play upon the word, Paul, verse 3, hurries to add, “But the Lord is faithful.”

The general idea of the verse is that a trustworthy God is more than a match for untrustworthy men.

Verse 4

“Confidence in the Lord . . .” As Christians and fellow-members of the body of Christ, the faithful should trust each other and have confidence in each other, the same being an essential element of the spiritual environment surrounding the redeemed.

“Do what we command . . .” It is considered deplorable that many commentators have postulated plural authorship of 2 Thessalonians. There was only one writer, the apostle Paul.

Paul was endowed with the plenary authority as an apostle commissioned to reveal the content of Christ’s message authoritatively.

Verse 5

P. J. Gloag, *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 21, 2 Thessalonians, p. 63, wrote, “Not the love of God to men . . . but objectively our love to God.”

“The steadfastness of Christ . . .” One of the most hurtful tendencies of the current era is that toward impatience. The industrialization of the economy with its invariable emphasis upon speed and speedy results, and such things as the quest for a constant state of euphoria, have led even many Christians into a loss of patience. Jesus said, “In your patience possess your souls.” (Luke 21:19) There are many who, through a burning impatience, no longer possess their

souls. The constant aching for diversion, novelty, excitement, euphoria, etc. is the greatest destructive influence that can be found in the world today.

The Christian life is not one unending stroll down some shady, flower-festooned pathway; but it is a struggle against all the erosive elements of time, against sorrow, and temptation, and at times even against boredom; and patience is the only stabilizer powerful enough to enable an effective completion of the conflict. “Applying all diligence in your faith supply moral excellence and in your moral excellence knowledge” (2 Peter 1:5)

Verse 6

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” This is an appeal by the apostle to the authority of his commission and office as an apostle of Christ. A. J. Mason, *op. cit.*, p. 162, wrote, “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 the audible repetition of the Lord’s name.”

The current widespread offerings of prayers without the “name on lip” mention of the Holy Savior, in whose name alone any man has right of access to the Father, is a violation of the principle manifest in this verse. When Paul prayed or commanded “in the name of the Lord Jesus” he never forgot to make audible mention of it.

Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 144, seems to have caught more accurately the spirit of Paul’s words in this place, writing, “Withdraw from such . . .” It signifies the withdrawing into one’s self, a holding oneself aloof from the offender in question.

This is not to be done in a spirit of superiority. The appeal to brotherliness shows that it is part of a man’s duty to the brotherhood that he should not condone the deeds of any who, while claiming the name of brother, nevertheless denies by his actions what the brotherhood stands for.”

“And not according to the tradition . . .” This is not a reference to human tradition, but to apostolic teachings given orally before there was any such thing as a New Testament.

Verses 7-8

That part of the apostolic behavior which Paul particularly stressed as an example to the Thessalonians was that of his working for a living, rather than living off the labors of others. It was his way of emphasizing that all men should work to support themselves.

CONCERNING WORK

Man’s great happiness is served by work; even Eden was not a place of idleness, but of work. (Genesis 2:15)

Even the angels on Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28:12) were not posed in attitudes of fixed and static devotion, but were ascending and descending upon it. Christ declared that “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” (John 5:17)

Children, therefore, of a working God and beneficiaries of the blood of a working Savior should honor their calling by a life of diligent, faithful work.

Gross laziness will destroy any people foolish enough to indulge in it. In the words of James I. Vance, contained in B. F. Hallock, *One Hundred Best Sermons*, page 434, (sermons by James I. Vance), quoted, “God is on the side of the worker. The worker has rights; the willful idler has none.”

“Nor did we eat anyone’s bread . . .” P. J. Gloag, *op. cit.*, p. 64, wrote, “This is a Hebraism, for ‘neither did we get our sustenance.’”

Verse 9

Paul was always careful to maintain his right of support, a right basically related to the right of all who labor in the gospel to live by the gospel.

Verses 10-11

"If anyone will not work, neither let him eat . . ." The shameful and unwholesome results of a weak and foolish system of charity which ignores this principle were outlined thus by W. F. Adeney, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 21, 2 Thessalonians, p. 85, when he wrote,

- (1) It injures the recipient. Idleness is a sin; and some of the worst trouble they had in Thessalonica came from that source.
- (2) It injures the giver. The encouragement of idleness is a sin that must be attributed to the thoughtless or foolish scatterer of God's gifts upon the undeserving.
- (3) It injures those who are truly needy. It is a case of taking the children's bread and giving it to the dogs.
- (4) It injures the community. It destroys initiative, diminishes industry, and propagates the worst element in society. The idle part of the population of great cities are the canker of civilization, in which are bred and incubated every vice and crime.

It is not stated definitely in the text but one of the things that seems to have entered into the prevalence of gross idleness, Paul sought to diminish and check, was a notion on the part of the idlers that Christ was coming soon and that there was no further need to work.

Verse 12

"We command and exhort . . . work in quiet fashion . . ." Things were in a mess at Thessalonica. James Moffatt, *op. cit.*, p. 53, analyzed the trouble saying, "The three causes of disquiet at Thessalonica are (a) the tension produced by the thought of the coming of Christ, (b) the disturbing effect of persecution, and (c) irregularity and social disorganization in the community."

The antidote for all these ills was simple, direct, and effective. “Shut up, and go to work!”

Verse 13

David Lipscomb, *New Testament Commentaries, Thessalonians*, p. 122, has a precious comment on this, thus, “While Paul who commands all who are able to eat their own bread, be quiet, and not to meddle, he cautions them not to cease to render assistance to the needy, to do good to all, as the opportunity affords. This is in perfect harmony with the foregoing instructions. Nothing discourages giving to the needy like having the lazy and meddlesome seeking support.”

Verse 14

This is a further word on what was meant above by “withdraw yourself.” It is all social dealings, visitation, companioning with offenders that must be ceased. Christians are simply not to mix with persons living in open rebellion against the teachings of the Lord. The purpose for such a rejection is that it might produce shame and repentance on the part of the offender and result in his restoration.

Verse 15

Raymond C. Kelcy, *The Letters of Paul to the Thessalonians*, p. 181, wrote, “This shows that Paul does not expect the faithful Christians to refuse to have any sort of contact with the disorderly.” He further said that the 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.

Verse 16

“Continually grant you peace in every circumstance . . .” P. J. Gloag, *op. cit.*, p. 65, wrote, “Peace here is to be taken in its widest sense, peace with God, complete salvation.”

Verses 17-18

Paul here declared that all of his epistles were similarly authenticated; thus it is likely that the usual Pauline “grace and peace” at the end of his writings were always written by himself, whether or not it was stated in the text of the letter, as here.

Thus concludes the shortest New Testament epistle addressed to a congregation. We are indebted to D. A. Hayes, *Paul and His Epistles*, p. 185, for the following observations:

- (1) The word “law” does not occur in either of the Thessalonian letters.
- (2) The cross is not mentioned in this epistle, and the death of Christ is mentioned but once.
- (3) In chapter 3 (verses 6, 14-15), is the first mention of church discipline in the New Testament.
- (4) The language of chapter 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.

Despite the brevity of this little jewel of a letter, however, it is freighted with some of the most interesting and instructive teaching in Holy Writ. Thanks be to God for the gift of His word!