

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

Introduction
2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
December 6, 1993

Intro: Reading time (aloud): 7 minutes.

It was, like 1 Thess., written in the early 50's, probably just a few weeks after his first epistle, surely within the same year. Also, as 1 Thess., from Corinth.

It is pastoral in character. We speak of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus as the Pastoral Epistles, but that is because they were written to pastors. But Paul was being pastoral in all of his epistles, and it is very apparent in 1 and 2 Thess.

Paul's references to prayer occupy much of these three chapters. Notice them in the following passages:

- 1) 1:2.
- 2) 1:3, 4.
- 3) 1:11, 12.
- 4) 2:13, 14.
- 5) 2:16, 17.
- 6) 3:1, 2.
- 7) 3:5.
- 8) 3:16.
- 9) 3:18.

There are a total of 14 verses here, and there are 47 in the entire epistle. So this means that about 30% of the epistle is given to prayer.

This tells us a great deal about the place and importance of prayer in the life of the Apostle Paul.

In addition to Paul's prayers, we can see that Paul did several things in this epistle:

- 1) He encouraged them. Paul was always strong on encouragement for the people of God.
- 2) He corrected and instructed them, and he did this in all three chapters.
- 3) He sought their prayers for his ministry with Silas and Timothy.

His epistle seems to have been prompted by the failure of the people to understand what he had said to them in his first epistle about the coming of the Lord. In chapter 2 we can see that some felt that they were already in the day of the Lord, (not the day of Christ as it is translated in 2:2), or that they were close to it. Others continued to be so certain that the Lord's coming was imminent that they had quit working, and consequently Paul accused them of being disorderly (3:6, 7, 11) and having become "busybodies" (3:11). Paul felt that this was very dishonoring to the Lord, and so he instructed the church as to the proper discipline which should be exercised against them.

It does seem that the questions which had been raised about Paul's ministry, and which he had defended in the first epistle, were no longer a problem because he had nothing more to say about this in his second epistle.

It is a fairly easy book to outline, especially because it is short. But the divisions as Paul moved from one point to another are very clear. However, let us not think of the book just in terms of an outline. It was a message from his heart to their hearts, and that message flows from the beginning of the epistle right on to the end. And yet an outline may help us to see Paul's thinking throughout the epistle.

Let me suggest this as an outline:

PART 1 -- CHAPTER 1

I. Greetings and Invocation (1:1, 2).

II. Thanksgiving (1:3-5).

III. Encouragement through Instruction (1:6-10). God will judge those who persecute His people.

IV. Intercession (1:11, 12).

PART 2 -- CHAPTER 2

V. Encouragement through Instruction (2:1-12). They were not in the Day of the Lord because there were things that had to take place first.

VI. Thanksgiving (2:13, 14).

VII. Exhortation (2:15). This is for perseverance in their lives and in their service.

VIII. Intercession (2:16, 17).

PART 3 -- CHAPTER 3

IX. Paul's Request for Prayer (3:1, 2).

X. Encouragement and Prayer (3:3-5).

XI. Exhortation for Church Discipline (3:6-15).

XII. Benediction and Conclusion (3:16-18).

There are three major parts, and each part has four divisions.

Now we turn to Part 1, Chapter 1.

1:1 Although the words may be slightly different in their arrangement, the only real difference between this introduction and that in 1 Thess. is the use of "our" instead of "the" Paul's first reference to the Father in 2 Thess.

Paul included Silas and Timothy, as he did in 1 Thess. This letter is also addressed to the church in Thessalonica. And Paul prayed for the same two blessings that he did in 1 Thess., grace and peace. All of this is included in one verse in 1 Thess.; here, in two verses.

1:2 Notice that grace and peace were still needed by the church in Thessalonica, and be sure to remind yourself where these blessings come from.

Notice also that Paul stressed the Fatherhood of God for His people, and in both of the first two verses he used the full Name of our Lord: "the Lord Jesus Christ." See "Lord Jesus Christ" also in 1:8, 12 (2x); 2:1, 14, 16; 3:6, 12, 18 -- a total of ^{five} ~~eleven~~ times, ^{three} ~~in~~ each chapter ^{2 + 3}.

In 2:16 Paul also repeated his emphasis upon God as our Father. How important it is for us to dwell upon these titles which Paul has given to God and to His Son. There is much blessing in meditating upon these truths. The more certain things are stated in Scripture, the more important they are, but the greater the possibility that we will overlook the truth that they convey to us, and the blessings they hold for us. We can safely assume that God loves to be called our Father, and our Lord is delighted when we call Him the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:3 Paul began this verse and 2:13 in the same way.

"Bound" -- Paul included Silas and Timothy in this because he said "we." Paul meant by the word "bound" that they were under an obligation to render thanks to God "always" for them. Notice that he did not just say that he was thankful for them, but that it was his constant duty, day by day, week after week, etc. to be thankful to God for them.

Now if we are "bound" to do it, then it is a sin not to do it. Cf. what Samuel said to the people of Israel in 1 Sam. 12:23. Prayer is not just a privilege; it is a duty. And the same is true of thanksgiving. When we pray for the Lord's people, let us remember to give thanks to Him for them. Whatever good there is in any of our lives, it is there because God has placed it there. Whatever truth we know, He has taught us. Whatever blessing may be passed on to others through us has originated with God.

And the more the world tries to eliminate God and Christ from our lives, the more diligent we should be to keep them in our lives. You have heard about the recent attempt to make the Boy Scouts take out of their pledge that they will be faithful to God and their country. Our courts do some very dumb things these days, but we can be thankful that they ruled in favor of the Boy Scouts.

Rush Limbaugh was discussing the other day that in our schools we can say, "Happy Holidays," but we can't say, "Merry Christmas," because that is too religious.

If you were listening to the comments made recently about thanksgiving in the world, we were told many times how thankful we should be, but I didn't hear any of the newscasters or politicians talk about being thankful to God. Notice how the Bible speaks of thanksgiving. It not only tells us what we are to be thankful for, but it reminds us constantly that we are to be thankful to God! It is not enough to feel thankful; we need to tell Him that we are thankful. We not only need to keep Christ in Christmas, but we need to keep God in our thanksgiving.

"As it is meet" means that it is right and proper and fitting that we should do so. God is continually doing things for us and in us and through us, it would be not only a serious failure not to give Him thanks, but it is a grievous sin!

But what in particular was Paul thankful for as he thought of the believers in the church at Thessalonica? Two things:

- 1) Their faith.
- 2) Their love.

Their faith was directed toward God, and their love also would have been directed toward God, but Paul was thinking here about their love for each other.

He mentioned both of these things in 1 Thess. And here he is thanking God again.

But apparently between the writing of 1 Thess. and this second letter, the faith and love of the believers had been increasing for the better. Here Paul spoke of their faith growing exceedingly, and their love abounding.

This is the kind of a church you want to be in. The faith and love of the people was probably very contagious. It is good to be with people who are not standing still spiritually, but who are growing in the Lord. The people in the church at Thessalonica were really trusting God in their daily lives, and their love for each other was such that it was a delight to be with them. But Paul knew that this was all the result of the work that the Lord was doing in their hearts. His prayers for them were being answered, and this caused him to pray ever more. But most of all he knew that he was under a divine obligation to thank the Lord for the great blessings they were experiencing in Thessalonica.

1:4 But the blessings had not been limited to Thessalonica. As Paul visited with "the churches of God in various places, or communicated with them, he gloried, he gave thanks to God even more for what the Lord had been doing in Thessalonica. And in this verse he added "patience" to their faith. This means that they persevered in trusting God. They did not just trust God now and then when some special need arose, but they trusted God, and then kept on trusting Him. Their lives were characterized by a constant trust in the Lord.

However, we must not miss the latter part of this verse. Paul linked those first two words, patience and faith, with two other words: "persecutions and tribulations." Notice that both of those words are plural.

"Persecutions" -- This word speaks of the way the Thessalonians were being pursued by their

enemies who would do anything that they could to harrass them, to molest them, to trouble them, to make life as miserable for them as they could. And it was not just one occasion, but many--time after time! The Thessalonians did not have to look for trouble; the trouble came to them like waves of the ocean.

"Tribulations" -- These are tactics that men who hate God and Christ will use of oppress and burden and break down the people of God. The same actions can be called either persecutions or tribulations, but the words show different characteristics of the trouble people can bring into our lives. One result of persecutions is that it produces discouragement and makes people want to quit, to give up.

What the people of the church in Thessalonica were experiencing certainly was one reason that you find such an encouraging note to this epistle. What a blessing it must have been to the believers to know that Paul was continually thanking God for them, and that he not only prayed for them, but, as he indicates in chapter 3, he wanted them to pray for him.

But we need to notice another thing about the church, their high level of spiritual life, and what it had done to their trust in God and to their love for each other and to their willingness to persevere in the face of all of the relentless opposition which they were facing. God was using the trials to work in them that faith and love which are such a delight to the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ. A Christian without trials is never a strong Christian. But, even when trials come, our strength is derived from submission to the trials and a desire to persevere in doing that which pleases God. Only God can do this for us, and this is the reason that we need to continually thank God, not only for saving us, but for keeping us, and for working in us to make us what He wants us to be.

But we are not finished with the thanksgiving which Paul was offering to God. Let us go on to verse 5.

1:5 Here Paul said, in effect, "When I stand back and look at what you are experiencing in Thessalonica, and how you are reacting to it, what do I see?"

His answer: "I see 'a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God.'" But what did he mean by this?

"A manifest token" -- This is the translation of one Greek word, and it is only used here and nowhere else in the NT. It means a proof. It means evidence. Of what? "Of the righteous judgment of God."

Some would be inclined to say that the troubles which the Thessalonians were going through was proof that in some way, or ways, they had very seriously displeased God. But that was not true. Others would say that it was proof that God had forsaken them, and turned them over to their enemies. But that was not true either. It was a proof of "the righteous judgment of God."

What was Paul doing? Paul was turning their eyes to the Lord. The Lord was not grieved with them, nor had He turned His back on them and forsaking them. Paul was saying that the Lord was very much present in their trials. He was in total control. Knowing that He is God and absolutely sovereign, Paul could come to no other conclusion. Our steps are ordained by the Lord even when they bring us into troubled waters. And God was totally righteous in what was happening to the believers in Thessalonica because through their sufferings He was making them what He wanted them to be. And the very fact that they were enduring it all, and going on in their lives and service, was proof that God was with them, sustaining them, strengthening them, helping them, for His own praise and glory.

Can you see how all of this is so intimately tied together? What the Thessalonian believers needed was to keep their eyes on the Lord. He is always "righteous," never unrighteous, in anything that He does. And while we may be confused when we are in the midst of trouble, not able to see the wisdom of God in what we are experiencing, yet we need to rest in this truth until the day when the Lord enables us to see that our troubles, too, are proof that

God is not only absolutely righteous, but infinitely wise, and abounding in His love toward us.

The writer of the book of Hebrews told the believers to whom he was writing, Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby (Heb. 12:11).

But there is one more thing that Paul had to say in this verse.

We already know that God has purposes in everything that He does, or allows others to do. One of His chief purposes is our perfection, and it could be seen in the lives of the believers in Thessalonica, as Paul expressed it in verse 3. But here at the end of verse 5 we have another purpose expressed in these words: "That ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which ye also suffer."

The word "that" in the Greek is made up of two words which express purpose. So we could translate it, in order that. Trials are meant to show the sovereignty of God, the righteousness of God, in His dealings with us, His people, but they are also meant to show something about us!

I take "the kingdom of God" here to be the equivalent of salvation. Our Lord told Nicodemus that he could not enter the kingdom of God unless He were born again. But how can it be said that we are worthy of the kingdom of God, worthy to be saved?

Paul's words here have to do, not with making us worthy, but showing that we are worthy through what God has done for us in Christ. We are worthy in Christ, but Paul was indicating here that God delights to demonstrate that we are fully qualified to be a part of the kingdom of God.

Would you agree with me when I say that often, by our lives, we do a miserable job of really demonstrating that we are the children of God. By some of the things that professing Christians are doing these days, we give the world a strange impression of what it means to be a Christian. To say that we are Christians is one thing, but to live as Christians, to behave as the people of God ought to behave, is another thing. Christians are often as destructive, as disruptive and law-breaking as the people of the world often are. We feel that we have the right to break laws if other people are doing something which is displeasing to God. We see this constantly in demonstrations.

But even in lesser things, in the normal routine of daily life, on the job, in our homes, in our contacts with people in the church and outside of the church, do we demonstrate by the way we live that we know the Lord, that we love Him, and that our main purpose is to please Him?

Paul told the Thessalonian believers in his first letter that their lives and their witness was so strong and so clear that he really didn't have to say anything. He was saying the same thing here in 2 Thessalonians. And we need to know that when people can see more reality in our lives, there is going to be greater blessing in the church, greater glory for God, and a witness to the world that will be more fruitful. This is God's way. He works in us, and then through us. We must do His work in His way, and then we will be assured of His blessing.

1:6 December 13, 1993

There is another aspect to the sufferings of the Lord's people. God is not only righteous toward His people in the sufferings they experience, but His righteousness extends to those who are responsible for afflicting the people of God. The following verses show that we may not always see vengeance taken on our enemies here and now, but **judgment** is coming, and that is certain!

The point of the verse seems to be that God's righteousness assures that those who trouble the Lord's people will eventually be troubled themselves by God. And they will be recompensed in kind. The wicked will never get away with the evil that they have done.

We see instances of divine recompense in the OT prophets even where God raised up nations to judge His people, but they went farther in their judgment of Israel and/or Judah than God intended for them to go. And so they suffered judgment at His hand.

1:7 On the other hand, the people of God who have had tribulation will, in the Lord's time find "rest."

Regarding those who persecute the Lord's people, Matthew Henry (Vol. VI, p. 794) had this to say:

And there is nothing that more infallibly marks a man for eternal ruin than a spirit of persecution, and enmity to the name and people of God: as the faith, patience, and constancy of the saints are to them an earnest of everlasting rest and joy, so the pride, malice, and wickedness of their persecutors are to them an earnest of everlasting misery; for every man carries about with him, and carries out of the world with him, either his heaven or his hell. God will render a recompence, and will trouble those that trouble his people. This he has done sometimes in this world, witness the dreadful end of many persecutors; but especially this he will do in the other world, where the portion of the wicked must be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

For an illustration of this truth, cf. Isa. 10:1-19. (Read.) Also Obadiah.

The Greek word for "tribulations" was meant to convey the idea of pressure, tension, and the bearing down of a heavy burden. Paul could have used another Greek word for "rest" in this passage besides the one he did use which would have meant a temporary reprieve--like a serviceman's R & R. He is taken out of the battle for a time, but will eventually be sent back. And so it would seem that Paul used the word which he did () because he wanted to convey the idea of a permanent deliverance from the troubles which the Thessalonians were experiencing at that time--and would experience to a greater or lesser degree until they died. The word "rest" means a relaxation of the tensions which are caused by the troubles inflicted upon us for the Lord's sake.

It would seem that Paul was speaking here about the same rest which is mentioned in Heb. 4:9, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." Also Psa. 34:17, "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles." This is why the Apostle Paul could tell the Roman believers, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

However, when specifically will this be according to what Paul was saying in this verse?

Note: "When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." The remainder of this passage (down through verse 10) deals with this event.

"Revealed" -- This is the verb from which we get our English word, apocalypse. The noun which comes from this verb is the title given by the Holy Spirit to the last book in our Bibles, The Revelation of Jesus Christ. It points to that time ahead when the Lord Jesus will be unveiled. Paul was speaking of the time when the Lord Jesus will be unveiled, revealed, and people will see Him to be the unspeakably glorious Person that He always has been. His glory was veiled most of the time that He was here on earth. People saw Him as only a lowly carpenter, a mere human. To His own He made known His glory. Peter, James, and John saw it on the Mount of Transfiguration. Nicodemus saw it in a limited way in the miracles which the Lord Jesus performed. And that is why he came to Jesus. But the day is coming when the whole world will be made to realize Who He is. The time that Paul was speaking about is not the time when the Church will be taken up, but when the Lord Jesus comes, as He Himself said, "with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30).

One of our Christmas carols describes the Lord as He was here on earth at His first coming. Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the Everlasting Lord!

Late in time behold him come. Offspring of the Virgin's womb.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the Incarnate Deity,

Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.

When our Lord came the first time, His glory was veiled; when He comes the second time His glory will be unveiled, and then there will be no question in anyone's mind but that He is the Son of God Who became a man.

What a day that will be when He comes with His mighty angels! The One Whom Augustus Toplady called the "once despised Jesus" will then be seen to be the mighty Redeemer of His people, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

What we have here in 2 Thess. is not only written for the comfort of believers, but for those who do not believe in the Lord, that they might believe and be saved from the terrible fate which awaits those who depart from this life without Christ, or who are living when He comes, but have not trusted Him as Savior. Believers may have it bad now, but a glorious day of rest and deliverance is coming!

What will He do when He comes, and is unveiled?

1:8 George Milligan, in what generally is a very good commentary on the Thessalonian epistles, said that Paul was spiritualizing the judgment which will accompany the return of the Lord. Man will usually do anything he can to lessen the statements of Scripture regarding the judgment that is to come. There is no need to spiritualize this statement. If the fire which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah was a spiritual fire, not literally fire, then we can believe the "flaming fire" spoken of here will not be real, but spiritual. But then, what is spiritual fire? Is it just some kind of emotional torment?

What about Malachi's prophecy in Mal. 4:1? Listen to it.

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven;
and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble:
and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts,
that it shall not leave them neither root nor branch.

And the prophet Zephaniah said this:

Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord,
until the day that I rise up to the prey:
for my determination is to gather the nations,
that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation,
even all my fierce anger:
for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy
(Zeph. 3:8).

Let us remember that always in the past the judgments of God have been every bit as bad as God has said that they would be. This should convince us that the judgments which are still to come will be as bad as the Word of God say that they will be.

People try to explain away what the Scriptures teach about hell, but I would not want to be one who says that it shall not be, or that hell will only last for a short time. It may not be in accord with our reasoning, but that is because we do not understand the awfulness of sin, and how much God hates it.

What will our Lord be doing with this "flaming fire"? He will be "taking vengeance."

This does not mean that the Lord will be retaliating with uncontrolled fury against the enemies of His people. It does not mean that He will have people where He wants them and gratify Himself by judgments which will be out-of-hand. No, it means that people will be getting exactly what they deserve. As W. E. Vine said in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, "The judgments of God are holy and right" (IV, 184).

In the bowl judgments described in the book of The Revelation, when the third angel pours out his bowl of judgment upon the earth, an angel will say, as terrible as the judgment will be, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments" (Rev. 16:7). No

angel has ever, or will ever, accuse the Lord of violating justice by His judgments. It is interesting to see that the One Who came the first time to provide salvation for sinners from the judgment of God, will be the One Who, when He comes again, will execute divine wrath upon those who do not know God and have not obeyed His Gospel.

Let us keep in mind that we are in a passage of Scripture which speaks of those who have troubled the people of God by persecution and tribulation. And yet when Paul spoke of the coming judgment, the sin which he mentioned for which judgment will come, was not the troubling that had been done (although that is involved). But basically the sin goes to the root cause, the main reason, that people trouble and persecute the Lord's people. It is because they "know not God, and...obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

These two statements explain both why people sin, and also the remedy for their sin. They sin because they do not know God. They might be religious like Paul was, thinking that in persecuting the Lord's people he was serving God. But the root of his problem was that he did not know God, and he had not obeyed the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which told him to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ so that he could be saved.

This is a very interesting verse in the light of what we are seeing in our country today. Why will even children commit such terrible crimes? Why do adults commit such terrible crimes, the reports which we read or hear about every day? And I am not exaggerating when I say, "every day." Why are we plagued with such things? Is it because of a poor background? That may be a part of it, but you often find that crimes are committed by people with money and affluence. Is it because of bad experiences they have had as children? Again, that might be a contributing factor, but you don't find that in every case. No, the reason is that people do not know God, and they have not obeyed the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!

You and I know that man's real problem is that he is a sinner--a sinner by nature, and a sinner by choice. And there is only one remedy for that! It is in coming to know God, and the only way that we can know Him is through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, when you tell people this, you are accused of being naive. Do you know what they mean when they say that? They mean that you are simple, untaught, which actually means that you are stupid, and you don't know what you are talking about. But I would rather believe God than people, wouldn't you? And we have God's answer here in verse 8.

Cf. what Paul wrote in 1 Thess. 4:3-5, finishing with that statement at the end of verse 5, "the Gentiles which know not God."

Cf. also Gal. 4:8, 9 on knowing God. Knowing God means deliverance from sin's penalty, and continuing to know God in an ever-increasing way, means deliverance from sin's power. Let us never be ashamed to speak to people about their need to know God, and that they can only know Him through trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is interesting that Paul should speak of not obeying the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. You would think that he would say that people will experience the judgment of God because they have not believed the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have a similar statement in Rom. 1:5 where Paul speaking of his own apostleship said,
By whom we have received grace and apostleship,
for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name.
Why not belief of the faith?

Perhaps the best answer is found in the message which the Apostle Paul preached on Mars' Hill in Athens. As he was concluding his message he said this:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at;
but now commandeth all men every where to repent:
Because he hath appointed a day,
in which he will judge the world in righteousness
by that man whom he hath ordained:

whereof he hath given assurance unto all men,
in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Perhaps we have weakened the Gospel message by making faith in Christ so optional with people. The truth is that failure to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is considered by God as the greatest possible rebellion against the will of God. And this is why there were those people in Thessalonica who were persecuting the church; they were disobedient to God, did not know Him, and had not experienced the transforming power of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before I leave this verse let me comment on Paul's own testimony regarding the persecution of the Lord's people. Cf. what the Lord said to Paul when He struck him down on the road to Damascus. Cf. Acts 9:4, 5. And then see Gal. 1:13. And finally, 1 Tim. 1:12, 13. It is evident from these Scriptures that Paul considered his greatest sin, the one which actually could have barred him from heaven, the persecution of the Lord's people. People can't get to the Lord anymore, and so they do the next best thing in their estimation; they persecute His people. None of us can really understand how terrible this is in the sight of the Lord.

But let us go on to verse 9.

1:9 The "everlasting destruction" which Paul mentioned here is a word ("destruction") which emphasizes not the suffering of the one being punished, but the satisfaction of the One Who does the punishing, the judging. No one will get more than he deserves, but all will get all that they deserve.

They will be driven forever "from the presence of the Lord." But this expression also means that the punishment of sinners will come from the Lord Himself. And it will be a demonstration of the glory of God's power. Men who have proudly said that they would take their chances when they stand before the Lord, will find out that there will be no indecision on the Lord's part. The day of mercy will be over; judgment will be measured out to them.

And if this judgment were not to go on and on for all eternity, it would not be called "everlasting destruction. Quoting Matthew Henry again,

This destruction will be everlasting. They shall be always dying, and yet never die. Their misery will run parallel with the line of eternity. The chains of darkness are everlasting chains, and the fire is everlasting fire. It must needs be so, since the punishment is inflicted by an eternal God, fastening upon an immortal soul, set out of the reach of divine mercy and grace (VI, 795).

What ominous words these are! And how they should cause anyone who reads them, or hears them, to think long and hard about their eternal destiny. And it should make those of us who know the Lord to be more zealous in warning people to flee from the wrath to come by obeying the Gospel, and putting their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 8 and 9 contain words as heavy and as solemn as they can get. But verse 10 tells us that there is a brighter side to the coming of the Lord in glory.

1:10 The Lord not only will come to take vengeance on those who do not believe, but He will come "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

The meaning here is not primarily that we will glorify Him by our praises, but that we will glorify Him by what we are, in our persons. That will be a day of glory for Him! And Paul indicated here that this will be one of the reasons for His coming. A. R. Fausset in the JFB commentary said,

Once they believed; now they see. They took His word on trust; now His word is made good, and they need faith no longer. With wonder all celestial intelligences (Eph. iii. 10) shall admire the Redeemer, because of the glory He has wrought in them that believed during their earthly probation (VI, 472).

To admire the Lord is to marvel at Him, to wonder at the manifestation of His glory not only in Himself, but also in the lives of every person who has believed in Him. Paul, in Romans 8 says that all creation is waiting for "the manifestation of the sons of God." See Rom. 8:19. It is obvious that something is very wrong in our world. When the Lord comes in His

glory, then there will no longer be any argument as to what has been needed.

All of this leads Paul to tell the Thessalonian believers how he has been praying for them. Please note again that the certainty of the believer's glorification does not discourage prayer, but rather encourages it. The more we believe in the coming of the Lord and in the glorification of His people, the more we will pray that these very things will come to pass.

1:11 "Wherefore" means to this end. Paul's prayers seem always to have been prompted by the truth of God. And he included those things which were made certain by the eternal decrees of God. And so here we have three requests in verse 11 growing out of what Paul had just written about the people of God, and the purpose of those requests is given in verse 12.

Request #1: "That our God would count you worthy of this calling." "You" is emphatic.

Cf. v. 5.

God has called us to salvation. He alone can make us worthy of such a calling. The meaning here is not entirely clear, but it must mean that Paul was praying that He, God, would so work in their hearts, giving the desire for holiness, and causing them to live with that as their objective, so that there would be no contradiction between what they claimed they were going to be, and what they were at any given time in their lives.

Request #2: "And fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness."

Paul was praying that God would Himself fulfill all of the desires which His goodness prompted in their hearts.

Request #3: "And the work of faith with power."

"Work" in Scripture is often synonymous with the life. We live by faith in the hope that we shall some day not only be with Christ, but like Him. Many obstacles stand in our way. Faith often is weak and falters. Therefore, it is necessary that God strengthen the believer's faith so that he will persevere toward the goal of his salvation. As has been mentioned, the day will come when our faith will be turned to sight, but for now we walk by faith.

1:12 The purpose of the above requests: "That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and (the) Lord Jesus Christ."

As a result of God's work in us, He will be glorified in us, and the work of glorification will be completed in us by, and only by, "the grace of our God and of (the) Lord Jesus Christ."

There is only one article (the) in the Greek so that the latter part of this verse would read the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ. Fausett, in the JFB commentary, says that "the one Greek article to both implies the inseparable oneness of God and the Lord Jesus" (Vol. VI, p. 473).

We would never conceive that such a glory would be possible if this were not taught in the Word of God. It is so far beyond anything that we could do for ourselves that no believer should need to be convinced of his need for the grace of God and of Christ. We are saved by grace. We are kept by grace. We grow in grace. And when we are finally conformed to Christ, i.e., glorified, then we will know without any doubt that we have been glorified by grace, too.

Let me point out again that even though these things are guaranteed by the purpose of God in salvation, yet it is important for us to pray as Paul did, that God's purposes would be fulfilled in us, His people. We may not understand why this is necessary, but we can see from Paul's prayer that it is, and so we need to do it.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

January 3, 1994

Intro: I suggested as we began the study of 2 Thessalonians that the chapter divisions give us the main divisions of the epistle. That is, Part 1 is chapter 1; Part 2 is chapter 2; Part 3 is chapter 3. I also suggested that there are four divisions to each Part.

The four divisions in Part 1 are:

- 1) Greetings and Invocation (1:1, 2).
- 2) Thanksgiving (1:3-5).
- 3) Encouragement through Instruction (1:6-10). They had been suffering for the Gospel; Paul assured them here that God would judge those who opposed them.
- 4) Intercession (1:11, 12).

Now, as we come to chapter 2 and Part 2, we find four divisions again:

- 1) Encouragement through Instruction (2:1-12).
- 2) Thanksgiving (2:13, 14).
- 3) Exhortation (2:15).
- 4) Intercession (2:16, 17).

When we come to Part 3, chapter 3, we will again see that there are four divisions to the chapter.

The difficulty which Paul had to deal with in chapter 1 was the persecution which the people were suffering. There Paul assured them that God was not only righteous in permitting this, but He was also righteous in eventually dealing with those who were doing the persecuting. They would be punished with eternal separation from the Lord.

The difficulty here in chapter 2 has to do with the fears of the people because they had been deceived into believing that they were already in the day of the Lord. In other words this would mean that they were in the Great Tribulation which they had been led to believe they would escape. We can see from this how severe their sufferings must have been. But again, as we shall see, Paul calmed their fears by going over with them what he had taught them before. (See his question in verse 5.)

With that brief word of introduction to chapter 2, let us begin to examine what the Apostle Paul had to say to them.

This would be V. in the outline.

V. Encouragement through Instruction (2 Thess. 2:1-12).

2:1 In the first two verses of this chapter Paul sought to calm their fears.

Paul in using the word "beseech" was speaking to them as friends on a par with each other. In other words, he was not rebuking them as an Apostle, but he was graciously expressing his hope that their fears would be dispelled. He used the same word in 1 Thess. 4:1. His love also is seen in the fact that he addressed them as "brethren." So there is a great deal of tenderness in the Apostle's manner as well as in the words which he used.

The basis of his comfort for them was "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him."

"Coming" is the translation of the Greek word, _____. Paul used it in 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:24. It speaks of the personal presence of the one coming; in this case, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is His arrival, His return.

When He comes, believers will be gathered together "unto him." He will come, and we will come to Him. The only other time that the word "gathered together" is used in the NT is in Heb. 10:25, where we are told not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together" as some were doing. The Jewish synagogue was so-called because it was a place where the Jewish people gathered together. The Greek word is _____, and emphasizes gathering in one place "unto him."

Paul was saying here that we are not looking for the Day of the Lord; we are looking for the Lord. That is the next event in the plan of God. As we think of current events and all of the ominous things that are taking place, we need to remind ourselves continually that what we are looking for and expecting at any time, is the personal appearance of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we meet in our churches, we are gathering together with each other. But it is very important that we remember also that the Lord meets with us, not visibly, but invisibly, and yet in a very real sense. The day is coming when there will be the largest meeting of the Church there has ever been, and then the Lord will be physically and visibly present with us.

We have illustrations of this in John 20:19, and 26.

Years ago we used to sing that chorus, "There's going to be a meeting in the air." Holding this hope before us is enough to calm all of our fears.

But let us go on to verse 2.

2:2 Paul did not want them to be like a ship at sea being tossed around by giant waves. This is what it means to be "shaken in mind." They had thoughts sown in their minds, false teaching in this instance, and it upset them completely. They became "troubled." And this was continuous, or would have been if they continue to believe what they had heard.

Such teaching could have come to them in any one of three ways, or by a combination of the three:

- 1) "By spirit," which seems to mean a person who claimed to have the gift of prophecy. In such passages as 1 John 4:1-3 we are taught "try the spirits whether they are of God. And in Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians we have his exhortations found in 5:20, 21.
- 2) "By word" simply means that someone had passed on these ideas by word of mouth. They may or may not have said that it came from Paul, but it would have done its damage however it may have come.
- 3) "By letter as from us." This has been taken to mean that someone had written the church, and forged the Apostle's name to it, teaching that they were in the Great Tribulation. This is probably one of the reasons Paul said what he did at the end of this epistle. See 3:17.

The best MSS reading of the latter part of this verse is the day of the Lord, not "the day of Christ." Those are two different days. "The day of Christ" is the rapture; the day of the Lord is the Great Tribulation. They were not being told that the Church had been raptured and they had been left, but that they had been falsely taught that they would be

raptured before the Great Tribulation, and that they were already in it.

2:3 The Devil will use whatever means he needs to use to deceive us, the people of God. He was busy at work in those days, too. But no method of the Devil needs to work IF we are well taught in the Word. He does his greatest damage where believers are not instructed in the Word. That is a major reason why it is so important for churches to teach the Word. That has to be #1 in priority! That is our first job. Everything else follows from that.

Paul said that the day of the Lord cannot come until first there is a major "falling away." The Greek word is _____. You can tell from the pronunciation of the word that this is where we get our English word, apostasy. An apostasy is a turning away, a defection, from the truth of the Word of God. But this apostasy referred to here is to be a major turning away. From this same root we get the Greek word for divorce. In an apostasy the truth is repudiated just as in a divorce a marriage partner is repudiated.

In 1 Tim. 4:1-3 we have a description of what the apostasy will be like, and of some of the things which will be taught. See also 2 Tim. 4:3, 4. In 2 Pet. 2:1-3 we have another description of the apostasy.

We can see some evidence of this today. There have always been apostasies. And we can see how conditions today are paving the way for such a time because of the terrible lack of Bible teaching there is, and the failure of so many to walk in the truth.

One characteristic of this final great apostasy will be the appearance of "that man of sin, the son of perdition." Fausett stated in his commentary that as Christ is the embodiment of righteousness, so this man will be the embodiment of sin. The Greek word here which is translated "sin" is the word for lawlessness. This man of sin will be one who had contempt for the law, and who delights in showing his contempt by his continual violation of the law. And in context the reference to the law must be the law of God, the Word of God.

He, like Judas (see John 17:12), is called, "the son of perdition." This means, as Charles Erdman has pointed out, that he "is lost and ruined and destined to destruction" (p. 86), i.e., eternal destruction.

A further description of his activities is given in verse 4.

2:4 He "opposeth" all that has to do with God.

You can see how this is being done today, and that the world is being prepared for the revelation of this man of sin, of lawlessness. Our children cannot pray in the public schools. The reading of the Bible is prohibited. Attempts are being made to get God's Name out of the Scout pledge, or to expand it so that it is not limited to the God of Christians. At the same time we have legalized abortion and homosexuality. Governments refuse to punish criminals; we would rather rehabilitate them. And so we have a massive crime problem on our hands. This man of sin will find that there are multitudes who will welcome him when he appears on the scene.

But that is not all. He will even want to take God's place, and will show himself to be God, and will accept (probably demand) the worship which

belongs to God alone!

So Paul predicted by the Spirit 2,000 years ago the things that we are seeing take place in our day, not as dominant as they someday will be, but they are here nevertheless.

The mention of "the temple of God" is an indication that there will be a temple at that time, and so it will be rebuilt sometime between now and then. Most likely it will be after the rapture, and during the first part of the Day of the Lord, or the Tribulation Period. This man of lawlessness will do something to show that he is the Messiah, but, of course, he will be an impostor.

2:5 As Paul spoke of these things he wanted the Thessalonian believers to remember that he had taught them all of this before. How important it is that we remember the truth. And we should be thankful that the Holy Spirit has been given to us for that very purpose. Cf. John 14:26. Nevertheless, we should be faithfully reading our Bibles, going where we can be instructed in the Word of God, and even memorizing the Word--or reading it until it is indelibly imprinted upon our minds. It is so easy for us to forget what we have been taught.

One thing that will help us to remember the truth is a determined and constant effort on our part to see the practical implications of the truth, and then to see that it becomes a part of our lives.

In the light of all that we have seen thus far, how important it is for us to see that our lives are built around and upon the Word of God. It is not going to get easier to be a Christian, and to live for the Lord. In fact, we are beginning to see that it will be easy for us to get into legal trouble if we stand by the Word of God. We are going to see in the verses that follow that the Devil is not yet able to do all that he intends to do, and will do, so we need to take advantage of the liberties which we still have. Even our Lord said,

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day:
the night cometh, when no man can work (John 9:4).

Not only because of the brevity and uncertainty of life, but because we can see the signs of the approaching great apostasy, we need to be busy NOW doing the work that the Lord has called us to do. And let us remember that doing His work includes doing His will in our lives.

Beginning with verse 6 the Apostle Paul began to explain why the Devil has not yet been able to carry out his plans after almost 2,000 years.

2:6 Paul indicated here that the Thessalonian church knew why the man of lawlessness had not yet appeared on the scene. And he indicated what he was talking about by his use of the word, "withholdeth."

This word can be translated in several ways, all meaning the same thing. One interpretation is to hold down securely--as the police do when they capture someone who is suspected of committing a crime. His days of freedom are over. He can not longer do what he has been doing, or what he intended to do if he is taken before committing a crime. The verb means to hinder, to restrain, to hold back.

More than that, we see that he will "be revealed in his time."

Paul was beginning to remind us here that although the Devil is greater

than we are, and that his power is greater than any man or group of men,
yet he is not greater than God!

After the Apostle John spoke of "the spirit of antichrist" (1 John 4:1-3) which he said was already in the world, he went on to say in the next verse (v. 4):

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them:
because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

Who is in us? The Holy Spirit. Who is in the world? The Devil.

The time will come when the man of lawlessness will be revealed, and when he will exercise great, demonic power. But that time has not yet come. The time is not set by the Devil. If it had been, the man of lawlessness would have come long ago. No, the time is set by God! And although we can see things being prepared, yet as long as this divine hindrance is in effect by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Devil is powerless to bring him on the scene.

2:7. Paul indicated in this verse that even in his day there was a spirit of lawlessness in the world, a defiant attitude toward God, a refusal on the part of men to believe in Christ. However, by the use of the word "mystery" he was saying that the world is yet to see the powers of evil in action as they will be some day. And in the latter part of this verse he said that the one "who now letteth" (the same word we had in verse 6 which was translated "withholdeth") "will let until he be taken out of the way."

Let me read the verse to you as it is translated in the NASB:
For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work;
only **he who now restrains** will do so
until he is taken out of the way.

Who is now restraining evil, lawlessness? The Holy Spirit is. When will "He be taken out of the way"? It surely must be when the Church is caught up to meet the Lord.

This does not mean that the Holy Spirit will no longer be at work in the world. We know that people will still be saved during the Great Tribulation, and no one can be saved except through the Holy Spirit. No, it simply means that for a time the Holy Spirit will not restrain as He has restrained lawlessness in the past.

Things are bad now, but do you know why they are not much worse? It is because the Holy Spirit is restraining this spirit of lawlessness. If He were not restraining evil, man would soon destroy himself and life on this earth would be utterly impossible.

What will happen then?

2:8 "And then that Lawless One will be revealed."

There have been many different suggestions as to who this Lawless One will be. Personally I believe he is the Antichrist. He will claim to be the Messiah (which is the meaning of Christ), but he will be an ANTI-Messiah. Anti means both in place of and against. This will be the last major attempt on the part of Satan to take the whole world away from God.

I doubt if anyone has ever read this passage carefully without wishing

that Paul had said more. Actually he does say more, but not until he has told us what the end of the Man of Lawlessness will be, how long he will be able to maintain his evil influence on the world, and when his destruction will take place. In verses 9 and 10 Paul briefly will tell us what the Man of Lawlessness, the Antichrist, will do.

From what we learn from the book of the Revelation, it does not appear that the Man of Lawlessness will come immediately after the Church is removed. The first part of the Tribulation will be comparatively quiet and peaceful. People will be deceived into thinking that world peace has actually come. But then the Man of Sin will be revealed, and he will continue until the Lord Jesus Christ comes in His glory to rule and reign upon the earth. The Lord (many of the good MSS have, Lord Jesus) will slay him with "the spirit of his mouth," and put an end to his power and influence by His own glorious appearing. What a day that will be!

January 10, 1994

2:9 The word for coming in this verse with reference to the Man of Sin is the same word that we used again and again for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ: _____.

There seems to be in the use of this word the idea that someone who has been expected, has finally come. We expect the Lord to come back because it is predicted in Scripture, and we expect the arrival of the Man of Sin for the same reason. This is the idea expressed in Heb. 10:37, quoting from Hab. 2:3, 4, where we read,

For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come,
and will not tarry.

The Habakkuk passage expresses it in a slightly different way:

Though it tarry (speaking of a prophetic promise),
wait for it; because it will surely come,
it will not tarry.

So we are to be assured that just as we know that the Lord is coming, we can be just as sure that the Man of Sin is coming.

The Man of Sin, or Lawlessness, is described as one whose coming is "after," or according to, "the working of Satan." It has also been translated, "whose coming results from Satan's power" (Arndt & Gingrich, p. 635). Just as God stands faithfully behind Christ, so Satan stands faithfully behind the Antichrist. The Spirit of God chooses His words carefully. He mentioned the Devil here as Satan, which means an adversary. He is an adversary to God, to the purposes of God, to the Son of God, to the Word of God, and to the people of God. Satan opposes everything that has to do with God. And then Paul went on to mention four particulars in which we see the work of Satan in the work of the Antichrist -- three are in verse 9, and the fourth is in verse 10.

The first: "With all (kinds of) power." "All" here means all kinds of power (Eadie, p. 284), and probably applies also to "signs" and "lying wonders." So we could read it, all kinds of power, and all kinds of signs, and all kinds of lying wonders.

The power of the Man of Sin is not divine power, but it is superhuman power, power delegated to Satan by God. It is miracle working power. So people who are easily influenced by anything miraculous will be convinced in their hearts that the power of the Man of Sin shows that he is the true

Messiah. This ought to be a warning to us that miraculous and unusual things happening do not prove that the work is of God. Remember that the magicians of Egypt changed made their staves into snakes, and changed water into blood, and brought up frogs out of the waters. But this did not prove that what they did was of God! The Devil has power to perform miracles.

The second: (All kinds of) "signs." This is the very same word that is used to describe the nature of our Lord's miracles. They were "signs," i.e., His credentials, proof that He was the Son of God. The Man of Sin is going to have the same purpose in His miracles, an attempt to prove that he is the person that he claims to be, the Messiah. He is a messiah all right, but a false one.

The third: (All kinds of) "lying wonders." Just as "all" seems to belong to all three of these words, so Frame (p. 269) believes that "lying" also belongs with all three. This would not deny the reality of the things which the Man of Sin will do, but it shows the purpose. And here we learn that the miraculous things which the Man of Sin will be capable of doing, and doing over and over again, which will cause people to wonder, to marvel, will be for the sole purpose of deceiving as many people as he can. The word "wonders" contains the idea that it is something so strange, so phenomenal, that people cannot help but notice what the Man of Sin is doing.

So all of these words actually describe miracles! Three words are used to describe their character and purpose.

We have a statement in the Olivet Discourse of our Lord which speaks of this very thing which will be seen finally in the Antichrist. See Matt. 24:24,

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets,
and shall shew great signs and wonders;
insomuch that, if it were possible,
they would deceive the very elect.

It is interesting to see that the Apostle Peter, speaking in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, reported in Acts 2, had this to say about our Lord:
Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth,
a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs,
which God did by him in the midst of you,
as ye yourselves also know (Acts 2:22).

So also of this is recorded to make us know that Satan and all that he does is intended to attract and to deceive those who watch what he does.

But let us go on to verse 10 to see the fourth thing that the Apostle Paul had to say about this Man of Sin.

2:10 The fourth: "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish." Again "all" would mean, all kinds of.

This statement is more comprehensive than the others because it seems to be a description of all that the Man of Sin will do, its character, and its purpose.

The purpose of our Lord's miracles was always good, righteous, and holy. His purpose was to bring people to Himself so that they would trust in Him

and become righteous in the sight of God. That is not true of the miraculous works of the Man of Sin. They come out of an evil heart, are unrighteous in character, and designed to keep people away from God. Listen to what John Eadie wrote about the Man of Sin:

The deceit is characterized by unrighteousness, or it leads to it...; its utterly iniquitous nature may be specially dwelt on. The Lawless one is wholly iniquitous and deceitful; he lives in guile, and that guile is ever hostile to righteousness. He does his work by seduction and lying, both in the false wonders and also in every possible form of wicked imposture. There is thus a terrible accumulation of epithets throughout this paragraph--a man of sin, a counter-God, mystery of iniquity, lawless one, working of Satan, false miracles, and every sort of iniquitous deceit. No wonder that perdition and thorough destruction are associated with them. But this deceit of unrighteousness does not prevail over every class; it has efficacy only--..."for those that are perishing" (pp.285, 286).

The world seems to be getting prepared for such an impostor. Sin is becoming more prevalent and brazen. People glory in their shame. We probably cannot really know how degrading and polluting will be the effect of what the Man of Sin will do. He will pretend to be the Christ, but his influence will be just as different from our Lord's influence as anything could possibly be.

We need to notice the wholesome, cleansing, godly effect our Lord had upon people. He did not push people farther into sin; He always brought them out, or sought to. No one was ever worse off because of the influence our Lord had on them; they were always better, or had the opportunity to be. But that will not be the case with the Man of Sin. He will be the personification of evil, and his purpose will be the moral ruin and eternal destruction of everyone who turns toward him.

Will you notice how Paul speaks of people here who do not know the Lord. He says lit. that they are perishing! Our Lord did not say that they will be condemned, but that they are "condemned already."

Why are they perishing? "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

Eadie said that "the love of the truth" is "the love that has the truth for its object" (p. 287). "The truth" here is the Gospel! People do not have to be violently opposed to the truth. They can be indifferent to the truth. Or they can be tolerant of the truth, and even sympathetic with it in many ways. But they need to love it, to prefer it above all else, and to embrace it for themselves if they are to be saved.

Paul was not saying that all unsaved people will be finally condemned at this time. He was speaking of people who steadfastly refused to have anything to do with the Gospel and with Christ. Remember that Paul was speaking of an extended period of time, the Day of the Lord, which will last for seven years. And so he was saying that people who do not receive the love of the truth will perish; they will not be saved.

And this is where God will step in, as we see in verse 11.

2:11 "God shall send them strong delusion." Just as God works in the hearts of people so that they will believe, we see here that there can come a time in people's lives when God makes it impossible for them

ever to believe. And when He does that, the evidence is that they will turn to error with the same kind of love with which they should have turned to the Gospel.

For God to "send them strong delusion" means that there will be an inner work of error so that they will believe, lit., the lie! What is the lie? It is that the Antichrist is the Christ. Imagine! People will turn to this extremely wicked man who corrupts everything and everyone he touches, and they will turn away from the holy, spotless, Son of God. Instead of being like our Lord Who loved righteousness and hated iniquity, they will follow a man who loves iniquity and hates righteousness.

And what is God's purpose in all of this? Look at verse 12.

2:12. "That" means in order that. "That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." There is a high price to be paid for loving sin instead of loving the Gospel.

People who say that God is too good ever to send anyone to hell, need to read 2 Thessalonians 2! He is good, infinitely good, but so good that He cannot look upon sin. And so when people reject the truth, there is no question as to what is going to happen to them. And notice that Paul said "all"! There will only be one way then to escape eternal damnation, there is only one way now, and there never has been but one way. Christ is that way! So even people whom the world might think of as good, will be damned along with those who are obviously very evil. "All" means all. there will be no exceptions.

Concl: This is one of the most solemnizing passages in the Bible. And while it applies to a time yet to come, we all need to pay special attention to the warning. We need to make sure that we love the truth, that we love the Gospel, that we love the Lord Jesus Christ. And one of the greatest proofs that we do will be that we love righteousness, and hate sin.

But there is another thing that this chapter should do for us. It ought to give us a greater desire to tell others about the Savior. Most of us are guilty of failing in this. It is important for us to live as God's people should live, but we also need to get our mouths open to tell people of Christ, and to warn them to flee from the wrath to come. For the present God is tolerating a lot of terrible sin. But it will not always be that way in our country. The day will come when with us, as it was with the Canaanites, our cup will be full of iniquity. And when that happens, people will learn that God is God, and that He is a holy God Who judges sin. If the reality of all of this were really impressed upon our hearts, we probably would have trouble sleeping at night while any of our loved ones are without Christ. Let us pray that the Lord will enable us to speak His Word with boldness. That is the way they prayed in the early Church. The result was that they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the Word of God with boldness. The result was they saw God doing many wonderful things as He took the Word through their mouths to touch the lives of other and bring them to His Son. And it can happen again. May God be pleased to use us as He has used His people in the past.

January 17, 1994

We come now to the second part of chapter 2, and what follows is in the greatest possible contrast with what Paul had just written:

VI. THANKSGIVING (2 Thess. 2:13, 14).

2:13 The first word in this verse introduces a contrast. A great host of people will never accept the truth of the Gospel, and, consequently, they will "perish," they will "be damned" -- strong words, but true words, and words intended to awaken any who presently (whenever this epistle might be read) continue to disobey the truth. Nothing worse could happen to anyone, and we need to remember that every day people are going out into eternity to "perish" eternally.

"But" that would not be true of the people to whom Paul was writing. They had believed the truth of the Gospel. They were a part of "the church" which was "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." They were the people of God, and their lives were proof that they really knew the Lord, as we learned in chapter 1.

The "we" is emphatic, and stands at the beginning of the verse in the Greek text. It was like Paul was saying, "We of all people, and more than anyone else, 'are bound to give thanks alway to God for you.'" And then he went on to speak of what God had done in their salvation.

Paul used almost the same words in 1:3 where he first expressed the fact, that he also expressed here, that they owed God a great debt of praise and gratitude for those who believed in Thessalonica.

We don't know how the Thessalonians felt about their salvation, but it would have been understandable if they had wanted to give Paul thanks for coming to Thessalonica with the Gospel. But Paul did not encourage that, nor did he feel that way in his own heart. Neither did he thank them for being receptive to the Gospel when others rejected it, and opposed him and his co-workers. Paul gave all of the praise, and he did it all of the time, to God! Paul was God's instrument, but God did the work! The people did believe, but, as we are going to find out now, it was the outworking of what God had determined to be done "from the beginning." And now we are going to see what Paul believed and taught about the salvation of all who ever have been or ever will be saved. They were "chosen" by God.

And then he addressed them as "beloved of the Lord," meaning that they were a people loved by the Lord. Before in the epistle Paul had called them "brethren." See 1:3 and 2:1. And after this he would continue to call them "brethren." See 2:15; 3:1, 6, 13. But here it is "beloved of the Lord" because the reason that they were saved was because of the special love which God had for them. Their salvation was not due to the fact that God saw that they would believe. Nor was it because He saw something good in them that He did not see in other people. If you want to know why God has chosen us, the answer is because He loved us. Why He would love us, we do not know -- but that is the reason. And the longer we know the Lord, and the more we learn about Him, the more we are amazed that He would ever love us.

Let us remember that the doctrine of election is not just a NT doctrine, but it is an OT and a NT doctrine. And there are two very interesting verses in Deut. 7 which attempt to explain why God has chosen those whom He has chosen. I am speaking of Deut. 7:7 and 8. Listen to what it says. God was speaking to the people of Israel through Moses:

The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you,
because ye were more in number than any people;

for ye were the fewest of all people:
 But because the Lord loved you,
 and because he would keep the oath which he hath sworn
 unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out
 with a might hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen,
 from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Now you can answer the question for yourself. Why did the Lord love them?
 He loved them because He loved them, and would not break His oath.

It is impossible to explain love. Two people will fall in love, and perhaps their friends will say, "What can she see in him?", or "Why would he fall for her?" We have to say the same thing about God's love for us, don't we? "Why would He love me?" "Why would He love you?" It is a mystery to us! But we need to rejoice in this that, while we can't explain it even to ourselves, yet we know that it is true. And the very foundation of our salvation rests not upon our love for God, but upon His love for us. How we ought to treasure those words: "Beloved of God." Nothing is more amazing; nothing is more wonderful. And it is really true. God loves us, and He gave His Son to die for us. So this is far more than any human love you will ever see; this is divine love, an unchanging love, a powerful love, an everlasting love. Human love may at times fluctuate, but divine love never does!

And so it is because God loves us that He has chosen us. And, as this verse tells us, He has "chosen us to salvation."

Now when anyone tells you that election has nothing to do with who is being saved, take them to 1 Thess. 2:13. If words mean anything at all, then we are chosen to be saved. That is the purpose of God's choice of us. He has not determined to save everybody, but He will save those whom He has chosen. That is very clear in this verse.

The word that Paul used here is different from the ordinary word for election, and this is the only place where Paul has used this word in his epistles. It is the word ἐλάττω, a third person singular aorist of the verb ἔλαττω. It actually means that He has taken us, taken us for Him-self.

The thought in this word is illustrated by what the Lord said about Israel in Isa. 43:1:

But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob,
 and he that formed thee, O Israel,
 Fear not: for I have redeemed thee,
 I have called thee by thy name: thou art mine.

Evidently the Lord loves to say that about you and me: "Thou art mine." And we ought to love to say, "I am His." That is a miracle of grace. We have a hymn which expresses that, don't we?

Loved with everlasting love, led by grace that love to know;
 Spirit, breathing from above, Thou hast taught me it is so!
 Oh, this full and perfect peace! Oh, this transport all divine!
 In a love which cannot cease, I am His, and He is mine.

But when did He choose us? When did He begin to love us? Paul said here that it was "from the beginning." This means that before there was such a thing as time, before the creation of the world, back in what we speak of as eternity past (for want of a better expression), God chose us, God set

His love upon us. He determined then that you and I would be saved.

This is what Paul told the Ephesian church: cf. Eph. 1:3-6.

This is also what Paul told Timothy: cf. 2 Tim. 1:8, 9.

So the Lord did not choose us when we decided to believe in Christ. He chose us before there was a world, a universe. In His omniscience He looked down through time to see us, and in His omnipotence He has now accomplished for all of us what He determined to do "before the world began."

I can understand why people have trouble believing this. In fact, there are many of the Lord's people who don't believe in it. But let us not cast this aside, or try to explain it some other way. When we see and understand the doctrine of election, then we will understand why Paul was so insistent upon giving God thanks. The doctrine of election has to be true because it forever denies us the right to congratulate ourselves because we are saved, and it makes us realize that our salvation is traceable to the love of God and the grace of God and the wisdom of God and the power of God -- all explaining why we are saved! If Paul always gave thanks for the salvation of the Thessalonian believers, I am sure that he did the same thing about his own salvation, and we ought to do the same about our salvation. If you haven't done that today, be sure that you do it before you go to bed tonight.

But we are not finished with this verse yet, and we still have verse 14 to come.

We are "chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." What does this tell us about our salvation?

When I first began to see this great truth I thought that Paul had mentioned these two truths in the reverse order from what we experience them. And there would be nothing wrong with that. We are sanctified after we believe the truth. But I don't believe that anymore. I believe that Paul was teaching the Thessalonian believers the real order in which God works in our lives.

I am sure that we all know, or we should know, that salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord told Nicodemus that to be born again, or born from above, is to be born of water and the Spirit -- by the Word and the Spirit. He told Nicodemus that it was just as mysterious as the blowing of the wind. We can't tell where the Spirit came from to us, nor where He will go next in saving someone else. But it is clear that no one is ever saved except by the Spirit.

Now the basic meaning of the word sanctification is that we are set apart, set apart for God. And this work of the Spirit in which He sets us apart for God always precedes our believing. We are dead in trespasses and sins, and dead people don't do anything. Before Lazarus could hear the Lord and before He could come out of the tomb, he had to be given life. He did not receive life by coming out; he came out because he had life. In the same way you and I do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ before we have spiritual life; that is impossible. We believe because the Spirit of God has done a work in our hearts, setting us apart for God, giving us life, so that our believing in Christ is the first thing we do after we have been saved. This does not mean that the Spirit's work and our

believing are days apart, or hours apart, or even minutes apart. In fact, they are almost simultaneous, but the Spirit has to do His work first, or we would never believe. We would be incapable of believing.

Let me give you a couple of very familiar verses which teach the same thing: John 1:12, 13. (Read.) "Which were born" is spoken of as something which took place before the people believed. Let me be perfectly clear on this. No one is ever saved who does not also believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Scriptures clearly indicate that God works first in our hearts by the Spirit, and He is the One Who brings us to faith in Christ. This is why you and I can't even take credit for our faith. We are not adding that last thing to the work of Christ that needs to be done before we can be saved. Faith is God's gift to us, and the evidence that He has done a work in our hearts is that we believe in Christ.

However, let us also remember that this sanctifying work of the Spirit does not end when we believe. That work is only started, and it continues on as the Holy Spirit enables us to grow and to become more holy, more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

But now Paul completes the statement of our salvation in verse 14 -- and let us remember that all of this is in the context of Paul praising God. If our believing brought us salvation, then he would have had to give some credit to the Thessalonians, and we would be able to take some of the glory for ourselves as well. But we can't take the credit for ourselves; it all belongs to God, and we need to thank Him every day that our salvation is all His work.

2:14 We have learned in verse 13 that God has chosen us, and that the Spirit has set us apart and brought us to faith, faith in Christ, but there are still two things that we need to know about our salvation;
 1) Why we came to the Lord in the first place.
 2) What the goal of our salvation is.
 Both of these are given to us in this fourteenth verse.

Why did we first become interested in God? Why did we first get concerned about our sins? That, too, was a work of God. Paul says that it was because God "called" us.

When our Lord was here on earth He said, "No man can come to me..." (John 6:44). God draws us by calling us. We become aware of the fact that God is dealing with us. The Gospel begins to become important to us, and it also begins to make sense. We start to see ourselves as sinners under the judgment of God, and yet we learn that the same God Who is our Judge has also provided a way to escape that judgment. He sent His Son to take our penalty so that we might be saved from judgment. And so we realize that He is calling us.

Bible teachers and theologians have historically said that there are two kinds of calls, i.e., calls of God:

1) A general call in which all people are urged to believe in Christ and to turn to God for the forgiveness of their sins. And this is why we say, "Who~~s~~soever."

But then there is also:

2) The effectual call, or we can also speak of it as the effective call. This is the call of God which is given to those whom the Lord intends to save. And this is what Paul was speaking of when he wrote that God has called us by the Gospel.

A pastor, or an evangelist, can stand before a group of people and issue a general call for people to be saved. However, while many will hear that call, and go away without trusting Christ, that general call can become an effective call when God begins to deal with an individual, or individuals, for the purpose of saving them.

Or you can tell another person about Christ many times, and they will not believe. But then there can be that special time when you give them the same Gospel, but they do believe. They trust in Christ and are saved.

I say this because we can't give up on anybody until they die. We don't know who is going to believe, and who will never believe. So we keep giving the Gospel, trusting the Lord to use His Word according to His own will, and for His own glory. But we always need to remember that we don't make people come. God calls them, and when He calls in a particular and personal way, THEY ALWAYS COME! This is why we speak of irresistible grace. It is not because people are saved against their will, but because when God's time has come for a person to be saved, he senses the call of God, and all resistance suddenly goes away, and he believes in Christ. Our part is to preach the Gospel, to call all people everywhere to repentance; but God is the One Who moves upon people's hearts so that they come to Christ and are saved.

But what is the object of all of this? What is God doing in the lives of those of us who are saved?

He is keeping us from going to hell! That is right, but that is not the main purpose of our salvation. He is making sure that we will be in heaven some day. That is right also, but neither is that the main purpose of our salvation. What did Paul say in this fourteenth verse? He said that we are called "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." What does this mean?

The glory of God, or the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, is what God is; it is what Christ is. So to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ means that it is God's plan for us to acquire the likeness of Christ. the Apostle John said that "we shall be like Him," speaking of Christ. Paul told the Roman church that we are "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son," that is, God's Son.

And so salvation is that work of God where through faith in Christ we are to be changed from what we have been, and we will be made like Christ. We will never be Deity; that is not the point. But we are going to take on in a more limited way the very character and likeness of Christ. How amazing! We would never have planned for salvation to be like this! This is truly more than we would ever ask for, or think of as a possibility. So when the Devil tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit, and told her that if she would, she would be like God, indicating that God didn't want her to be like He is, he was telling the worst lie that he could possibly tell her! God does want us to be like He is. He wants us to be like His Son. And this is the whole purpose of our salvation.

But I can't leave this verse without reminding you that this change gradually takes place with all of us through spiritual growth. This is why we want to learn more about our Bibles because our Bibles tell us about God, and what we need to be and do if we are to be like He is.

Paul has expressed this in a verse we find in 2 Corinthians. The verse is

2 Corinthians 3:18. It reads like this in the KJV:

But we all, with open face
beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,
are changed into the same image from glory to glory
even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

I wish I could combine ideas from various translations to help you to see what is in this very important verse. Let me try.

In that third chapter of 2 Corinthians Paul had been speaking of the time when Moses had been up in the mount with the Lord, and came down with his face shining, reflecting the glory of God. But the people could not look on his face it was so bright, and so he put a veil over his face when he spoke with them. But now we look upon the glory of our Lord, not seeing the brightness of His glory in person, but we see His glory in the Word. That is the glass, or mirror that Paul was speaking about. And the result of continually looking upon the Lord in the Word, learning of Him, and by the Spirit, seeking to be like Him, we are, as the NIV says, "being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory."

I don't usually use the RSV because it is so unreliable in many places, but I like the translation that is given to this verse. In the RSV it reads in part, "And we all...are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another..."

You see, the change that the Lord is making in our lives, is not instantaneous. It is gradual, by degrees. It is as the NIV reads, "ever-increasing." Spiritual growth means that we are becoming more like our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why God has saved us. And the work will never be finished as long as we are here on this earth. We will always need to grow to our dying day, or until the Lord comes. BUT THEN, WHEN WE FINALLY SEE HIM, THE WORK WILL SUDDENLY BE FINISHED, AND WE WILL BE LIKE HIM.

So you see what is important for us to do? We are to keep looking at Christ in this mirror, the Word of God. And as we do, the Holy Spirit will be working in our lives to make us more like our dear Lord.

It is James who has likened the Word of God to a mirror. Let me read for you James 1:22-25.

So when we read the Word, we see Christ, and we see what we need to be and how we need to live if we are to be like Him. By God's grace, and only by His grace, we should be able to see that the difference between Him and us grows less and less the longer we know Him and the more we keep looking at Him in the Word.

Let me repeat what I heard my theology professor, Dr. Lewis Chafer, say many times in our Seminary classes. I have quoted him many times before, but I love to think of his words. He said this: "God is so delighted with His Son that He is going to fill heaven with people who are like He is."

So God has saved us to keep us out of hell. And He has saved us to take us to heaven. But the main reason He has saved us is that we might share His glory, that we might become like Him.

January 25, 1994

This brings us to the third point in the chapter, the seventh in the epistle:

VII. EXHORTATION (2 Thess. 2:15).

2:15 Second Thessalonians is lacking in the abundance of practical exhortations which are usually found in Paul's epistles. Most of the epistle is given over to teaching, such as we have had in chapter 1 concerning their afflictions, in chapter 2 with regard to the false teachers who were telling them that they were already in the day of the Lord, and in chapter 3 about the brethren who were walking disorderly. Paul did insert brief exhortations like "rest with us" in 1:7, and "be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled" in 2:2. But 2 Thessalonians is quite different from 1 Thessalonians on this point, and here in this verse we are about to learn why.

Be sure to notice how Paul continued to address the Thessalonian church: "Brethren" -- a total of seven times in this brief epistle.

Paul here exhorted the Thessalonian church to do two things:

- 1) To "stand fast."
- 2) To "hold the traditions which they had been taught."

We might think that, in view of the strong teaching of verses 13 and 14, the believers in Thessalonica would not have to be concerned about practical matters. If our salvation is secure, and the God Who chose us in eternity past is going to see us through to "the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, then what is it going to hurt if we are, in the words of Matthew Henry (VI, 800), "careless and secure." Does the Word of God encourage careless living because our salvation is secure in Christ?

Absolutely not! Instead of discouraging holiness of life and obedience to the Word of God, the Scriptures not only encourage it, but command it. As we have seen before, the grace of God does not eliminate human responsibility, but the two go hand in hand. In fact, one of the evidence of true grace is faithful obedience. A professing believer who does not "stand fast" raises all kinds of questions about the reality of his profession. Our Lord said while He was here on earth, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The Apostle John, in 1 John 2:27 and 28, told the believers to whom he was writing, that the Spirit's anointing would abide in them, but then he went on to point out their responsibility to abide in Christ.

So Paul told the Thessalonians to "stand fast."

See what he had written to them in 1 Thess. 3:8. In spite of the opposition they were facing, and the teaching they were getting which was contrary to what Paul had given them, they were to hold their ground and to persevere as though there were no trouble at all. Paul would tell the Corinthians in a later epistle that they were to "be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

So the secure position that we have in Christ is not an excuse for ungodly living, but it is to be a main reason for being faithful. Holding our ground is one major part of being faithful to the Lord, and Paul had much

to say about it in his epistles. Cf. Eph. 6:13, 14.

We may not all be as fruitful as we would like to be, but we are all to be faithful. Paul wrote to the Galatian churches,

And let us not be weary in well doing:
for in due season we shall reap if we faint not (Gal. 6:9).

We need to be faithful in prayer, faithful in reading the Word, faithful in obeying the Lord, faithful in serving the Lord. Our Lord told the church at Smyrna,

Be thou faithful unto death,
and I will give thee a crown of life (Rev. 2:10b).

I hope this point is firmly fixed in your mind. If our lives do not back up what we profess to be and what we profess to believe, our profession is hypocrisy. But we need these exhortations, and should never overlook their importance in our lives.

But to what, or in what, were the Thessalonian believers to be faithful? Where were they to stand fast?

Paul said that they were to "hold the traditions which" they had "been taught."

To "hold" means that they were to use the strength that they had to keep what they had received. A good example of this is what you see basketball players doing in a game. One player takes the ball and starts down the floor toward the opponents basket, and all of his strength is used to prevent anyone from taking the ball away from him until and unless he passes it to one of his own team members. Or think of soldiers who have taken some territory. Once they have taken it, they do not take time out to enjoy their victory. No, they have to hang on to what they have taken; they have to "hold" it.

The Devil and his forces will do all that they can to nullify any progress that we make in our relationship with the Lord. Don't let them do it. Don't relax as far as your praying is concerned, as far as your attendance upon the ministry of the Word is concerned, as far as your obedience and holy living are concerned. "Hold" what you have. Don't let anybody take anything from you, and don't lose anything by your own carelessness. We are in a battle, and we can't afford to go to sleep.

But what did Paul have in mind when he said, "the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle"?

"By word" pointed back to the teaching he had given them when he was with them in Thessalonica -- his verbal ministry. "Our epistle" refers to 1 Thessalonians! The NT has not yet been fully written, and so it had not been compiled into a book as we have it today. What they had was Paul's teaching when he had been with them, and when he had written to them. And Paul would certainly have included the teaching which Silas and Timothy had done.

What did Paul have in mind when he used the word "traditions"?

Actually the word means something which is passed along. The idea is that we have received something which we are to use and to protect and then to pass it on to others. And yet it means that we continue to hold on to and

abide by what we have passed on.

And excellent illustration of the meaning of a tradition is found in 2 Tim. 2:1 and 2. Listen to what Paul wrote to Timothy:

Thou therefore, my son, be strong
in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
And the things that thou hast heard of me
among many witnesses,
the same commit thou to faithful men,
who shall be able to teach others also.

Paul did not originate his doctrine. He had received it from the Lord. And perhaps you remember how he had checked it with those who were apostles before him. He passed on the truth to Timothy exactly as he had received it, and he was expecting Timothy to pass it on to others, who in turn would pass it on to other faithful men.

This is how the Word has come down to us. But now we have the completed tradition in the OT and NT, and we need to be very careful to check everything that we hear, and everything that we pass on, with what has been written in the Word of God -- BECAUSE (and let us remember this) there are BAD AND FALSE TRADITIONS as well as GOOD TRADITIONS!

The scribes and Pharisees were critical of the disciples because they did not keep "the traditions of the elders." But the Lord condemned those traditions as being the commandments of men, i.e., things which men had added to the Word of God which were false and misleading. See Matt. 15:1-9 and Mark 7:1-13.

In Col. 2:8 Paul issued a warning against "the tradition of men," i.e., the teachings that men give claiming that it is the Word of God and yet which has no foundation at all in Scripture. How important it is for every child of God to know the difference! And it is equally important for us to remember that we have not been given the Word of God to keep for ourselves, but we are to pass it on to others!

Traditions in a society can be very good things. One of the tragedies of our society is we are seeing the disappearance of good traditions that have been a part of American life for years. The tradition of honesty, of hard work, of faithfulness to our spouses, our families, our country, of thanksgiving to God, and on and on. And these have broken down because there has been a radical departure from the traditions of Scripture -- that which has been handed down to us in the Word, and by those who have been faithful teachers of the Word. I will never forget what a transformation I experienced in my own life when under the teaching of Dr. Chafer at Dallas Seminary I was exposed to some of the teachings of Scripture which I had never heard before. And I hope that in some small measure I have had a part in passing on those godly traditions to others.

And I say to you today, let us make sure that we are doing what Paul told the Thessalonian believers to do. 2 Thess. 2:13 and 14 are excellent verses for all of us to memorize, and review frequently. But it is just as important for us to memorize and remember verse 15. "Stand fast, and Hold the traditions which ye have been taught," whether it has come directly to you from the Word, or to you from the Word through the teaching of others. Churches and professing Christians everywhere are departing from the Scriptures. This is no reason for us to do the same. It is all the more reason for us to be faithful, and not let anyone take the Word of God from us. To be faithful to the Word is the only way that we

can be pleasing to the Lord, or expect His blessing.

So we do not have a lot of exhortations in 2 Thessalonians, but we don't need a lot of them with this verse. This verse encompasses all of the Word of God for all of us in everything that we believe and in everything that we do. It would be hard to find a verse which is more comprehensive than this.

But now let us go on to the last point in this chapter, and the eighth point in the epistle:

VIII. INTERCESSION (2 Thess. 2:16, 17).

Chapter 1 ends with a prayer. Here chapter 2 ends with a prayer. And we can see by looking ahead that chapter 3 ends with a prayer. The beloved Apostle Paul who believed so strongly in the sovereignty of God believed just as strongly in his responsibility to obey the Word, to preach the Word, and to follow up his preaching with prayer.

2:16 It is one thing to know that we need to be faithful, and to persevere in the truth, but it is another thing to know how to do it. Paul tells us how it can be in the last two verses of this chapter. A faithful life is only possible through our Lord Jesus Christ, and through God, and They have seen fit to give us the help we need in answer to prayer. How important it is, therefore, that we pray for each other that the Lord will enable us to stand and to hold to the traditions of Scripture which we have read in the Word, and which others have taught us from the Word. We can't succeed on our own. Only by God's grace can we be and do what God wants us to be and do.

And what a prayer this is!

Let's remember that we don't just pray, but we pray to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to God. I understand what that little motto mean, Prayer changes things, but in some respects it conveys a mistaken idea. Prayer itself changes nothing, but God changes things, and our Lord changes things, in answer to prayer. It may seem superfluous to say that we need to remember that we are not just say prayers, but we are to pray to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think that Matthew Henry was right when he wrote in his commentary that this verse teaches us that we can pray directly to our Lord. Normally we pray to the Father in the Name of the Lord, but it is not wrong to pray directly to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't you like it that Paul said "our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father"? And it is interesting to note here that "our Lord Jesus Christ himself" expects to be personally involved in making us steadfast and faithful. He not only intercedes for us, but we are to appeal to Him in prayer, knowing that it is only by and through Him that we can "stand fast, and hold the traditions" which we have been taught.

The "Himself" is very emphatic, appearing as it does as the first word in this verse in the original Greek. In fact, we could really rearrange the words in this verse in this way to make it more in agreement with the original text: "Now our Lord Himself, Jesus Christ..." By His own promise He is always with us. He lives in us and through us, and, according to Phil. 4:13, we can "do all things through Christ which strengthen-

eth us. How precious it is to know that the Lord Jesus Christ is personally involved in each of our lives!

Frame suggests in the ICC commentary that Paul probably mentioned the Lord first here instead of the Father as he usually did, because it is the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are to obtain, according to verse 14. That sounds like a very probable explanation. But let us be sure to notice that this is very strong evidence of the Deity of our Lord. Under no circumstances could the name of a mere man be placed before that of the living God.

And again, as we saw in the expression in verse 13, Paul reminded the Thessalonian believers that their salvation was founded on God's love for them, not on their love for Him. It is as Matthew Henry said, "The love of God is the spring and fountain of all the good we have or hope for..." (VI, 801). And it is because He loved us, and continues to love us, that He has given us two priceless gifts:

- 1) "Everlasting consolation."
- 2) "Good hope through grace."

These are two of the many spiritual blessings that every believer has in Christ. The words "consolation" in verse 16 and "comfort" in verse 17 have the same root, and so are capable of being translated with the same words. So we have everlasting comfort which carries with it encouragement. It is inexhaustible, and sufficient, regardless of the nature of the trials through which we may go on our way to glory. We in our weakness can be so easily overwhelmed, discouraged, and defeated, but those are the times when we need to remember the resources that we have in Christ. Think of the grain that Joseph had to dispense to the people. It had been saved for them, but it was only given to them as they came to request it, or, as in the case of Jacob, when his sons came to request it for him.

"Good hope" speaks of the ultimate prospect which we have for our salvation. It is "good" because it comes from God, and can never disappoint us. It is good because of the comfort it gives us now. It is good because it strengthens us to face our present trials. So many things in this world are bad, but our hope is "good." And yet we always need to remember that we don't deserve it. We haven't worked for it so that God owes it to us. It is our only by God's grace. And so we are reminded that grace means not only that God does not give us what we do deserve, but He abundantly and eternally blesses us with what we never could deserve. John Eadie suggested in his commentary that the words "in grace" need to be connected with the words, "hath given us." Our comfort is not only provided and made available by grace, but measure out to us in a gracious and loving manner by God Himself.

2:17 However, although "comfort" is ours, we need to apply for it, or others need to apply for us. This is one of the great blessings of intercessory prayer. Spiritually we are multimillionaires, but often we live as though we were spiritual paupers. Comfort and stability are ours, but they come in answer to prayer addressed to Christ and to God. God is "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3). He has many ways of comforting us, comfort sufficient for whatever need we may be facing.

"Stablish" means that Paul was praying that the believers in Thessalonica would be turned in the right direction and determined to keep facing in

that direction. And Paul was thinking of it in connection with two things:

- 1) "Every good word."
- 2) "And work."

James Frame, in his commentary on the Thessalonian epistles which are a part of the ICC series, gives this translation of the last two verses of 1 Thess. 2:

Now may our Lord, Jesus Christ himself
and God, our Father, who loved us (Christians), and gave us,
in virtue of grace, eternal encouragement and good hope,
encourage your hearts, and make you steady
in every good work you do and word you utter (p. 277).

And so Dr. Frame would say that to "stablish" us means to make us steady. The NASB uses the word "strengthen." Therefore, we can see that God in His grace steadies us, strengthens us, and that the comfort which we thus receive is evident in the way we serve the Lord and in the very words which we speak. Tribulations are designed by our Enemy so as to discourage us and to make us quit. God's grace ministered to us in times of tribulation strengthen us to keep us going, and even to make us more faithful in living for the Lord and serving Him.

Such a work of God in our hearts will ward off, according to Eadie, the kind of things mentioned in 3:2.

In Phil. 1:18-20 we see that the situation was reversed for Paul from what we have here in 2 Thessalonians 2. In 2 Thess. 2 Paul was seeking the comfort of the Lord's people through his prayers for them; in Phil. 1 he was looking for comfort for himself from the prayers to God of the people for himself.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

January 31, 1994

Intro: This section, like the two previous sections (chapters 1 and 2), contain four parts:

- IX. Paul's Request for Prayer (3:1, 2).
- X. Encouragement and Intercession (3:3-5).
- XI. Exhortation for Church Discipline (3:6-15).
- XII. Benediction and Conclusion (3:16-18).

And so our next point is:

IX. Paul's Request for Prayer (3:1, 2).

Even though the three chapters deal with three different themes, there is a similarity of pattern which can be seen throughout the epistle. Each chapter contains prayers. Each chapter contains instruction and encouragement. And in chapters 2 and 3 there is exhortation. All of this is in connection with the subject of their tribulations in chapter 1, the false teaching which they had received about the coming of the Lord in chapter 2, and those who had quit working in chapter 3 because they were so certain that the coming of the Lord was near.

It is not surprising that a church with such a remarkable beginning and outreach to other areas would become a target of Satan. Wherever God is at work, the Devil will be at work, too. Wherever there is spiritual revival there will be spiritual warfare. Paul was using two weapons to help the Thessalonian church in its difficulties: (1) the teaching of the Word, and (2) prayer. That is probably the greatest reason that we have instruction and prayer throughout the epistle. As Paul told the Corinthian church later, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God..." (2 Cor. 10:4). And in the sixth chapter of Ephesians Paul speaks of the armor of the Word and prayer as the only means we have of standing against the wiles of the Devil. We need the Word defensively as well as offensively. And we need prayer defensively as well as offensively. By this I mean that we need to know the Word and live the Word as well as teaching the Word. We need to pray for others, but we also need to pray for ourselves and to ask others to pray for us. We are all involved in this spiritual conflict, and we need to be in readiness for the conflict all of the time. The army that begins to train after the enemy strikes, is already defeated. When there is the threat of an attack upon our country, or upon our people anywhere in the world, our armed forces are put "on an alert." We as Christians are to be always "on an alert." Peter emphasized this when he said this in 1 Pet. 5:8, 9:

Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary the devil,
as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:
Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions
are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

And so we see that in 2:15 Paul exhorted the Thessalonian believers to be steadfast in their relationship with the Word. Then he followed this with his prayer for them to that end in verses 16 and 17, only to follow that in chapter 3 with some prayer requests which he wanted them to remember on his behalf. And this is where we are in our studies.

3:1 Some have accused Paul of being like some of us in our preaching when we, to the relief of the people, say, "Finally," and then go on for another 15 or 20 minutes. But let me say in Paul's defense that "finally" did not mean that he was finished, but it meant that he had come to the

final thing that he wanted to mention in his letter. Sometimes this word is translated furthermore, or besides, or it remaineth, then. Paul had come to his final point, but he also was emphasizing that what he still wanted to say was built upon what he had already said.

"Brethren" -- the fifth of seven times that he used this term of endearment in this epistle. We are all members of the same family because we all have the same heavenly Father. Paul got into the family just like the Thessalonians did -- by the new birth -- although he was their older brother. It gives us a greater concern for each other, and helps us to put up with each other's weaknesses and failures, when we remember we are brothers and sisters in the family of God.

"Pray for us" -- Although Paul was their elder brother, and an Apostle, he did not hesitate to ask the church to pray for him. He needed their prayers, and he valued them. He really believed that through their prayers he would see greater blessing than he would if he did not have them. Notice that it was not just a prayer for himself, but "for us," i.e., for him and for Silas and for Timothy.

The words "pray for" suggested two things:

- 1) It was prayer to God that he was requesting. The most important part about prayer is the One to Whom it is addressed. The act of prayer is meaningless without addressing it to God Who answers prayer.
- 2) Paul was concerned about the purpose of their praying, what it would accomplish, its end and its aim (cf. Thayer, p. 546).

"That the word of the Lord may have free course," or, run.

There are many times, perhaps most times, when we do not see how effective the Word can be. We preach, but no one seems impressed, no lives are changed. That had not been the case in Thessalonica. Through the ministry of the Word, great blessing had come. And it had come fast. This was what Paul had in mind when he spoke of running. And not only had a great work been done in Thessalonica, but through the testimony of the believers there, a work of God had been done in other places. Paul did not always see this, but he longed to see it, and was requesting prayer that he would see it again -- "as it is with you."

"And be glorified" -- How is the Word of God glorified? How is anything or anyone glorified? To be glorified means to be seen as it really is. The Lord Jesus is glorified when people recognize that He is the Lord Jesus. We are going to be glorified when we are finally seen to be the children of God. A glorification is a manifestation. So often when the Word of God is preached, it is treated just like any other message. But you will remember that Paul said about the Thessalonians in 1 Thess. 2:13 that he thanked God unceasingly because, as he said,
 ...when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us,
 ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth,
 the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

This was the positive side of his prayer requests; the negative followed.

3:2 "That we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men" -- These two requests were presented later in reverse order in Paul's letter to the church at Rome. He wrote in Rom. 15:30, 31,
 Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake,
 and for the love of the Spirit,

that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;
that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea;
and that my service which I have for Jerusalem
may be accepted of the saints.

Paul used the same word for "be delivered" in both of the above passages. It means to be rescued, to escape. The opposition to the Gospel was fierce in those days. Every day the servants of the Lord faced the possibility of physical death because of their preaching.

"Unreasonable and wicked men" -- The Greek has the unreasonable and wicked men, which means, according to what Frame said in his commentary, that Paul knew who they were and how dangerous they were. He had faced some of them himself, and he knew that they would stop at nothing to silence the Gospel message. "Unreasonable" means out of place, that is, there was absolutely no reasonable explanation for what they were doing. The Gospel brought good and blessing, not harm. People were far better off who believed in Christ than those who did not believe in Him. And so Paul coupled with the fact that they were "unreasonable" the fact that they were "wicked."

"Wicked" means bad in its effect. So these men sought to bring evil upon people rather than to see them improved and blessed. This is a good illustration of what our Lord said in John 3:19, that "men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." He also said in denouncing the scribes and Pharisees, calling them "hypocrites,"

...for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men:
for ye neither go in yourselves,
neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in
(Matt. 23:13).

It is not enough for men who hate Christ and the Gospel to refuse it themselves; they have to keep others from being saved also or they are not happy!

Many, many times this request was answered in the life of the Apostle Paul. Cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-27.

So we need to pray not only that the Word will be accepted, but that those who oppose the Gospel will be hindered by the Lord from accomplishing their evil purpose.

"For all men have not faith" -- The Greek says, the faith. Not everybody is attracted by the faith, according to Rutherford, quoted by Frame, p. 292). Luther translated it, "For not to all does the faith belong" (Milligan, p. 110). "The faith" speaks of the message, the doctrine of salvation, here probably, the Gospel. One evidence that a person has the faith will be his desire to spread the Gospel, not extinguish it. Religious people who oppose the Gospel are, as the Lord called the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

Now we are ready for the next division:

X. Encouragement and Intercession (2 Thess. 3:3-5).

We see Paul's encouragement in verses 3 and 4, and then his intercession for the Thessalonians in verse 5.

3:3 There is no greater encouragement for our lives or for our prayers

than the knowledge that "the Lord is faithful." He is One Who can be trusted. He will remain true to His Word even when we are unfaithful. We can rely upon God and upon the Lord Jesus Christ with total confidence. They cannot and will not fail us.

Paul spoke of God's faithfulness many times. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:18 (where it is translated, "true"); 1 Thess. 5:24; 2 Tim. 2:13; Heb. 10:23; 11:11.

When Paul was writing to Timothy and telling him about his own troubles in the preaching of the Gospel, and how no man stood by him, he added this:

Nevertheless the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me;
that by me the preaching might be fully known,
and that all the Gentiles might hear:
and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

And then he went on to say this:

And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work,
and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom:
to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

These verses are 2 Tim. 4:17, 18. We could no clearer nor stronger testimony to the faithfulness of the Lord. We are the uncertain factor in our relationship with God; He never is.

Where is it that we should look first to see the faithfulness of the Lord? To see what He will do in us, and then for us. This is the thought in the latter two statements of this verse.

First, He "stablishes" us, or establish. It can also mean to strengthen. The idea in the word is that the Lord works in our hearts so that we will keep resolutely turned in one direction. The Lord showed that He was established when He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. Cf. Luke 9:51.

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were threatened with the fiery furnace if they did not fall down and worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar, they showed that they were established when they said,

O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.
If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us
from the burning furnace, and he will deliver us
out of thine hand, O king.

And then I love this next verse.

But if not, be it known unto thee, O king,
that we will not serve thy gods,
nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (Dan. 3:16-18).

They were resolutely faced in one direction, and not even King Nebuchadnezzar could make them change.

What did Paul say that the Lord would do for us? First, in us; then, for us.

"The Lord...shall...keep you from evil." The Greek says, "The Lord shall guard you from the Evil One." Milligan mentioned in his commentary that this is "the unanimous opinion of the G. commentators" (p. 111). And he went on to say that this "forms a fitting antithesis to _____ of the preceding clause" (Ibid.).

How could Paul say this when he was faced with such dreadful opposition almost everywhere he went, and ultimately, according to tradition, suf-

ferred death at the hands of his enemies?

He meant that with the Lord on our side, working in us and working for us, the Devil can never accomplish what he wants to accomplish. That was true when Saul of Tarsus wanted to stamp out the Church and blot out the Name of Jesus Christ from the minds and hearts of men. He did a lot of damage, but, although an instrument of Satan, he was never able to do what he really wanted to do.

So this is great encouragement for prayer. And it is great encouragement to rest upon the faithfulness of the Lord regardless of what the circumstances might be. No wonder that Isaiah said that we will be kept in perfect peace when our minds are stayed upon the Lord. He will work in us and for us, against our Enemy. What more can we ask?

3:4 Notice carefully the language of the Apostle at this point. He did not say that he had confidence in them. He did not even have confidence in himself. He said, "And we have confidence in the Lord touching you..." Cf. Phil. 2:12, 13. In Gal. 5:10 Paul said, "I have confidence in you through the Lord."

Paul was absolutely convinced because of what the Lord had done in their hearts that they would not fail, but would stand faithful to the Lord and to His Word because of the faithfulness of God -- "that ye both do and will do the things which we command you." They were people of one mind, set on pleasing God, and Paul knew that they would not change. In this way Paul was preparing the people for what he was about to say to them in verses 6 through 15. They had obeyed him in the past, and he saw no reason why they would change at this point. How wonderful it is to be able to say this about any believer, or any church! May the Lord help us to stand, and give us other believers who will stand with us. Before we can walk obediently we must learn to stand faithfully.

Now for Paul's prayer.

3:5 "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." "Direct" means to make straight. The thought here is that the Lord would do this quickly and remove any obstacles that would stand in the way.

But what is the meaning of the petition?

The verse has been interpreted two ways:

- 1) That they would love God more, and that they would wait patiently for the coming of the Lord. This certainly would have been Paul's desire for them. And this seems to be the meaning, especially for the latter part, as it is translated in the KJV.
- 2) However, there is another way of translating it, which probably is what Paul had in mind. It appears that Paul was praying that the Lord (probably the Lord Jesus) would give them a deeper understanding of the love of God, and of the Lord Jesus' own patience, or steadfastness, for the blessing it would be to them, and for the transformation that it would make in their lives.

Charles Haitian Spurgeon preached on this text on June 17, 1888, just four years before he entered into the presence of the Lord. And what a message it was! Or, I can say that it still is! But one thing that Spurgeon brought out in his message was the fact that this was a journey so wonderful, and so glorious, that the Apostle Paul did not feel prepared to serve

as a guide. Instead, he said, "The Lord direct you into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ." It is such a sacred journey that no apostle, no prophet, no pastor or teacher, can guide us there. The Lord has to do it. He alone can show us the glory of God's love, and the patience which He Himself demonstrates time and time again. Our salvation rests upon the love of God, but also upon the patience of Christ. To penetrate these truths is to go within the veil, to stand on holy ground in the very presence of the Triune God. And once there, our Lord, the Guide, leads us directly to see and understand God's love and His patient endurance in a way that we can never learn about them from each other. Paul or John or Peter or Isaiah or Jeremiah or David or many others can lead us up to the veil, speaking of the glories of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit has taught them. But the Lord has reserved for Himself the great joy of teaching each of us personally the truth about God's love and His patience, not all at once because that would be overwhelming, but step by step and day by day as we walk with Him and He opens to us the treasures of His Word until our hearts are burning with delight and overflowing with praise because of what we see and what we hear.

This is my prayer for you, and I hope it is your prayer for me. The only prerequisite for this course is a humble, hungry heart. It is our heart that the Lord wants to deal with because it is the truth in our hearts that gives us great joy and it is the truth in our hearts which is transforming to our lives. So let this be our prayer, and then let us watch to see how the Lord guides us, directs us, to know Him and to know our heavenly Father in a precious fellowship which we have never believed possible.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

February 21, 1994

Intro: Appreciation for Gary's teaching the last two weeks.

As you all realize, we are in the third and last section of this second epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians. The letter has three divisions, set out nicely for us by those who divided it into three chapters.

This third section has four parts to it, and Gary took the second part. Just to refresh your memory, here are the four parts:

- I. Paul's Request for Prayer (3:1, 2).
- II. Encouragement and Intercession (3:3-5).
- III. Exhortation for Church Discipline (3:6-15). This is the part we are ready for today.
- IV. Benediction and Conclusion (3:16-18).

Church discipline is practically unheard of in churches today, but it is very obviously taught and encouraged in the NT. Because of the lack of discipline, the church today has become corrupt in doctrine and worldly in practice. The object of discipline is the restoration of the believer, or believers, who have departed from the New Testament either in doctrine or in daily living. The leaders of the church are the ones to exercise discipline, but it is clear from the verses before us, as well as from other passages on discipline, that the church is to understand that discipline is to be exercised whenever there is a departure from the faith. And false doctrine and/or ungodly living are to be dealt with as soon as possible so that the leavening influence will not affect the whole church.

However, discipline is not to be exercised so quickly that the offending party does not have time to repent and change. Nor is discipline to be exercised carelessly. The OT principle that there needs to be two or three witnesses, is an illustration of the care that was to be taken then. The leaders were not to take hasty action just because one person happened to be critical of another person. The leaders of Israel were to act promptly, but were not to jump to conclusions, so to speak.

In the New Testament, we have the teaching of the Lord in Matthew 18:15-20 as one of the first examples of discipline. This, of course, was enlarged upon later in the teaching of the apostles, especially the Apostle Paul. Paul's word to the Galatian churches is good for all of us to remember. In Galatians 6:1 we read,

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault,
ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness,
considering thyself lest thou also be tempted.

I think Gary emphasized with you that verses 3 through 5 were actually written to prepare the church for what Paul was going to tell them in verses 6 and following. And I heartily agree with that.

As I have said, the purpose of discipline is always, always, restoration. And discipline is to be exercised with love and great deal of patience, the patience of Christ.

With all of this in mind, let us turn now to our text in 2 Thessalonians 3 to see what the issue was which Paul was concerned about, and how it was to be handled.

3:6 We might think from what Paul had said about the church in such a commendatory way earlier in the epistle, and then after he expressed

his expectation of them in verse 4 of this chapter, that everything was as it should have been in the church at Thessalonica. But that was not the case. Even though for the most part things were going well in the church, they did have their problems. This is always the case. You will never find an absolutely perfect church. There are always problems. And so, while most things were good, some things needed disciplinary attention.

Paul was writing here with authority -- the authority he had as an apostle. Note that he was not just advising them; he was commanding them. He did this graciously ("brethren"), but with the greatest possible authority. He was commanding them to take action "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Christ is the Head of the Church. And the apostles were commissioned to speak in His Name, that is, as though the Lord Himself were writing this epistle and telling the believers in Thessalonica what they needed to do. And the church was to accept it as the very word of the Lord -- which it was, and is!

This is important for us to learn in connection with our Bibles. The Bible was written by people, people who had received their message from the Spirit of God, and were to take it to the Lord's people just as they had received it. That is why we call the Bible, the Word of God. That is what it is! And we need to receive it, believe it, submit ourselves to it, because it is God Who has spoken to us in this Book. What we find in the Bible is not to be debated as to whether it is right or wrong. We are to submit ourselves to it concerning all of its doctrines and all that it says that we are to be and do. There is no other book that has ever been written which we must receive and believe and obey like we are to receive the Bible. It is the infallible and unchanging Word of God.

Now what did Paul say that they were to do?

They were to withdraw themselves from every brother that walketh disorderly. "Brother" indicates that he was speaking of a person, male or female, in the church, one who professes to know the Lord.

But the person that Paul was speaking about was walking disorderly. For Paul to use the word walk meant that he was not talking about a person who had committed a single sin, but a person who was living in a disorderly way.

And what does it mean to be disorderly?

The word is used in classical Greek of a soldier, or soldiers, who are out of step with the others. But how are we to know what is the correct way for us to walk, to live? Paul explained in the last part of the verse. A person was walking in a disorderly fashion, out of step, if he were not walking "after the tradition which he received of us."

Do you remember that we talked about traditions back in chapter 2, verse 15? And we learned that a tradition is something which is handed down from one generation to another. There are good traditions, and there are bad traditions. The traditions which Christians have are not only good, but they are perfect! God did not give all of His Word at one time. It was at least 1600 years in being written, and it was passed down from generation to generation until at last the Word was finished. In fact, you could say that the manner in which the Word of God was given to the Apostle Paul and the other writers of the Bible, constituted that Word as a tradition. God handed it down to the writers of the Bible, and from

there on it was to be passed from generation to generation forever.

Any person who is out of step with the Word of God is walking disorderly. The world has its traditions, its way of living, but they are contrary to the traditions of God. And one of the first things that a person has to learn when he or she becomes a Christian is that being saved means a change in lifestyle. We have to get in step with the Word of God. When we get out of step with the Word of God, that is when we become candidates for church discipline. The Bible not only needs to be preserved as a Book, but it needs to be preserved in the lives of the people of God. When the Bible says we are to live one way, and we live another way, we are out of step and walking disorderly. Or, when the Bible tells us not to do something, and we do it, we are walking disorderly. The Bible is our rule of life. It is a lamp for our feet, and a light for our path. Cf. Psa. 119:105.

For an example of disorderly living, cf. 1 Cor. 5. (Read the whole chapter.)

One of the signs of the sad state of the church today is seen in the fact that we tolerate so much in the way of conduct that is out of step with Scripture.

What was to be done with such a brother?

They were to withdraw themselves from him, i.e., exclude him from their fellowship. Now we know from other passages that this was not the first action to be taken by the church under the direction of its leaders. This was only done after everything possible had been done to get the person to change. But if he refused to change, then fellowship was withdrawn. This meant that he could have no place of ministry in the church. It meant that he would not be served communion. He may have been able to attend, but he was to be isolated from fellowship with the church in order that, according to verse 14, "he may be ashamed." And, hopefully, this would contribute to his restoration.

So far Paul has been speaking in general terms about a disorderly walk without saying what specifically was the problem in the Thessalonian church. But as we move on to verses 7 through 9 we come to a very important matter in the life of any church. It has to do with the example which is set by those who are in places of leadership.

3:7 The apostles were not just teachers, but they were examples. They were not just to teach people what to believe and how to live, but they were to practice what they preached. This is what Paul told Timothy that he needed to do. Cf. 1 Tim. 4:12. See also 1 Thess. 1:6.

This principle showing the ways of the Lord is not only to be carried out in the church, but also in the home. Our teaching will always be more effective if those we teach can see that we are seeking to live the way we are teaching them that they should live. No one is going to be a perfect example, but perfection ought to be our goal. So we continually seek to improve in our obedience to the Word of God.

Paul had taught this to the Thessalonians, and so he could say to them, "For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us." The word "ought" is our old friend, _____, best translated must. God's plan is for elders to be examples to the flock. Cf. 1 Pet. 5:3. Look at what Paul told Titus in

Tit. 2:7, 8. Peter also reminded those to whom he was writing that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Supreme Example. He said, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps, who did no sin..." (1 Pet. 2:21-23).

Paul was not being legalistic nor hard in what he was saying here. He was not only commanding them as to what they should do, but he was putting himself under pressure to continue to be the kind of an example that they should follow. There isn't anything about the Christian life that is optional. We are told in Scripture what we should be and what we should do, and that is the way that it should be with us. And if we have an example that we can follow, how thankful we should be! But whatever our situation may be, we must be obedient to the Word of God. We have no other alternative if we expect to please God, and if we expect to have His blessing.

How wonderful it was that Paul could say, and they knew that it was true, that "we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you."

3:8 Here we see for the first time what some of the Thessalonian believers were doing which was displeasing to Paul, and, most of all, to the Lord. It had to do with work, and it had to do with money.

February 22, 1994

"Bread" here speaks of food generally, but is the word that was commonly used for all of their food because it was the most basic in their diet. The meaning of this statement is that the Apostle Paul did not come to Thessalonica with the idea that the people there would support him while he was with them. "For nought" means freely, gratuitously. This expression is translated in several of the modern translations as meaning that Paul did not take any food from them without paying for it. He was very careful that people could not accuse him of being in Thessalonica for personal gain rather than for any way in which he could benefit the people.

This was a life-long principle with the Apostle Paul. He strongly believed that "the Lord hath ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14), i.e., that the Lord's servants should be supported by the Lord's people. But he did not believe that the servants of the Lord should demand, or even expect, that this should be the case. And so for himself, he worked. He worked long and hard, and he kept this up constantly, as he said, "that we might not be chargeable to any of you."

When he said "chargeable," he had in mind that he did not want to be a burden to them, to make life harder for them in order to see that his needs were met. Eadie said, speaking of the Apostle's work (probably making tents), that "it was heavy and unintermittent" (p. 312). Day after day, and often into the night, he worked to support himself and those who were with him. And yet, amazingly, he had time for the preaching of the Gospel, and for teaching believers, and he did it with great blessing from the Lord. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, in his second epistle he told them, "I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not your's, but you" (2 Cor. 12:14).

Paul was repeating here in 2 Thessalonians what he had told them before in 1 Thess. 2:9.

It is an alarming thing that Seminary students are being taught today to be very frank in telling churches the salary which they expect and need -- without being asked by the leaders of the church. This usually causes churches to back away, and we can understand why. When people give, we can be thankful. But we must be careful to avoid the charge that we are in the ministry for what we can get out of it. Matthew 6:33 is a good verse for all of the Lord's people, but especially for the Lord's servants:

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;
and all these things shall be added unto you.

3:9 Paul did voluntarily what he did with regard to the supply of his own needs. "Power" here is the Greek word for authority. God's ordained plan for His servants is that the Lord's people should support them. But this was to be done like the gathering of materials for the building of the Tabernacle. People are to give because God moves upon their hearts to give, and not because they are forced to do so by the Lord's servants. The kind of giving which delighted the heart of the Apostle Paul, and, we can be sure, the heart of God, was the kind that the Philippian church did when Paul was a prisoner in Rome. Cf. Phil. 4:10-20. (Read.)

Paul did what he did because he wanted to be an example to the church at Thessalonica in two respects:

- 1) He wanted to teach them by his example to trust the Lord to supply their needs.
- 2) He wanted to show them by his own example that the usual way in which the Lord does this is by our working.

How different the Lord's work would be today if we really trusted him to meet our needs. Instead, we ask people to pledge. More than once in my life, in fact, many times I have heard people say that what churches are interested in is what they can get out of people. That charge had been made against the Apostle even though he sought diligently to avoid it. And so we need to be careful about these things.

3:10 When Paul had been with them he had taught them "that if any would not work, neither should he eat." Cf. 1 Thess. 4:11, 12. Why some were not working, we can only guess. But it is generally thought that certain people in the church were so convinced that the Lord was coming back soon, that they quit their jobs, and were waiting daily for the Lord to come.

Now it is a wonderful thing for the Lord's people to be looking for the Lord's return at any moment. In fact, this is what we are encouraged to do by the Word of God. Cf. Titus 2:13, "Looking for that blessed hope..." But nowhere are we taught to quit working and to neglect our daily responsibilities because the Lord may come at any moment. Actually, just the opposite is taught in Scripture. Cf. Matt. 24:44-47.

The sincerity of our expectation that the Lord may come today is to be seen by our greater diligence in doing the work which we have to do.

Now, if a believer stopped working, the people of the church would feel obligated to support him. And so there would be a greater burden upon them. But Paul wanted them to know that if anyone were not working, he shouldn't be eating. This principle has its roots in the OT. Cf. Prov. 21:25, 26:

The desire of the slothful killeth him;

for his hands refuse to labor.
 He coveteth greedily all the day long:
 but the righteous giveth and spareth not.

This would indicate that the person who quits working for any reason, even if it be that he is looking for the Lord's return, he should not be commended for his spirituality, but he ought to be judged because of his slothfulness, his laziness. No work, no eat! It was just as simple as that. The Bible teaches us that the Lord is coming, but it does not tell us when. Quitting work is, in once sense, setting a date, or at least an approximate time. And Paul was condemning that in the strongest possible way.

3:11 One reason that it is bad to quit working is because it gives time to do things that we ought not to be doing. A non-worker can soon become a busybody. Paul was not thinking about those who physically are unable to work, or about those who are unable to find work, but of those to refuse to work. Even the person who cannot find work should be careful to occupy his time with profitable activity of some kind, and not with idleness.

What is a busybody?

Literally the word means a person who works around. He is not taking care of his own affairs as he should; instead, he gets involved in other people's lives, in their affairs. And what he gets involved in are usually things that are unimportant.

I find it interesting, and sad, that Paul had to speak about busybodies in one of his first epistles, and that he had to come back to this same subject in one of his last epistles. The only two epistles in which this word is used are 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy. In 1 Timothy Paul was speaking of young widows, and this is what he had to say:

And withal they learn to be idle,
 wandering about from house to house;
 and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies,
 speaking things which they ought not (1 Tim. 5:13).

Peter also mentioned busybodies. In 1 Peter 4:15 he wrote,
 But let none of you suffer as a murderer,
 or as a thief, or as an evildoer,
 or as a busybody in other men's matters.

And so there is no doubt but that work is beneficial to all of us spiritually. On the other hand, to be idle presents dangers which we would not have if we were busy doing our own work. Cf. again 1 Thess. 4:11, 12 -- written just before one of Paul's greatest passages on the coming of the Lord.

3:12 In verse 11 Paul mentioned that he had heard that there were people in the church at Thessalonica who were "disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." In this verse he addresses himself to them personally.

There is an important lesson in this, too. Often when the people of God get out of step with Scripture, we talk about them; we seem hesitant to talk to them. Actually we ought to talk to them first, protecting them from exposure, or further exposure, if that is at all possible. This is what the Lord encouraged in Matthew 18 where personal offenses were

involved. The Apostle Paul was teaching that by example here. What did he say to them? (Read. verse 12.)

Again, as in verse 6, Paul was speaking on behalf of "our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul was commanding and exhorting the offenders in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ so that they would know that, if they continued on in their present behavior, it was the Lord Whom they were displeasing, and from whom they could well expect judgment. When we are dealing with people, it is just as important that they understand that we are not just trying to force our opinions on them, but that we are giving them the Word of God.

To work "with quietness" means to mind your own business instead of spending time telling others what they should be doing. But it also means to go about your business, not drawing attention to what you are doing, but just doing it primarily to please the Lord. Work produces spiritual benefits for us, but also material benefits. If we work, we eat; if we don't work, we don't eat. It is just as simple as that.

God gave Adam work to do before he sinned. And He didn't change that after Adam sinned. The difference was that his sin made his work more difficult. So let us work, be thankful that we can work, and that the Lord has given us the ability to do what we have to do. Paul sought to teach by his example as well as by his words, and we should seek to do the same thing. Even as we get older, we need to keep busy doing whatever the Lord gives us to do. Solomon gave good advice for his day as well as for ours: "Whatsoever they hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Ecc. 9:10a). Paul told the Roman church that they were to be "not slothful in business" (Rom. 12:11).

Matthew Henry made this comment:

It was a proverbial saying among the Jews, He who does not labour does not deserve to eat. The labourer is worthy of his meat; but what is the loiterer worthy of? It is the will of God that every man should have a calling, and mind his calling, and make a business of it, and that none should live like useless drones in the world. such persons do what in them lies to defeat the sentence, In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread. It was not the mere humour of the apostle, who was an active stirring man himself and therefore would have every body else to be so too, but it was the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness we work, and eat our own bread, v. 12. Men ought some way or other to earn their own living, otherwise they do not eat their own bread (Vol. VI, pp. 804, 805).

To work quietly means at least two things:

- 1) We work minding our own business, not other people's business.
- 2) We make no great fanfare about what we do. We simply work from day to day, faithful in our responsibilities, seeking to please the Lord in what we do.

3:13 Here Paul indicates that those who are doing the right thing, serving the Lord as they should, need encouragement to continue on doing what the Lord has given them to do. Cf. also Gal. 6:9, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season..."

Paul was indicating, as Erdman said so well, No matter what may be the conduct of others, do not fail in doing the fair and noble thing. Persevere in your honorable course. Do not

tire in the path of duty (pp. 98, 99).

Another person's disobedience does not justify our disobedience. We do not know what affect Paul's letter had on the busybodies. Hopefully it was very effective. But even if no one changed, the faithful people were to continue to be faithful, and not to be weary in doing what the Lord had given them to do.

We often think of serving the Lord as doing something in the church, or conducting a Bible class somewhere. And that is serving the Lord. But we need to remember that the Lord considers all that we do as service to Him if we are where He wants us to be, doing what He wants us to do, and seeking to do it for His glory. It must have been very encouraging to the servants in Colosse for the Apostle Paul to write to specifically to them,

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh;
not with eyeservice, as menpleasers;
but in singleness of heart, fearing God:
And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily,
as to the Lord, and not unto men;
Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward
of the inheritance: FOR YE SERVE THE LORD CHRIST
(Col. 3:22-24).

A mother's ministry can be taking care of her children. At times our ministry can be taking care of some needy member of our family. We have a continuing ministry to each other, to be examples, to give encouragement, and, whenever possible by the Lord's leading, to pass on the Word. Cf. Isa. 50:4.

3:14 The last two verses of this section have to do with those who continued walking disorderly in spite of all that the Apostle Paul had written. The people were:

- 1) To "note" him. This means that he was to be identified. Just how this was done, we are not told. But he was to be designated as one who was out of step with the Word of God. The word "note" actually means to mark him.
- 2) "Have no company with him." Fellowship was to be withdrawn.

The object of this was that the offender "may be ashamed." And in his shame, would repent of his sin, turn back to the Lord, and be reinstated in fellowship with the people of God. If a person is truly saved, he will not be able to continue in a life of broken fellowship with the Lord nor with the people of God.

And here is Paul's final word about those who were walking disorderly:

3:15 The offender should be treated as a believer, not as an unbeliever. He may not be a true believer. If that is the case, time will bring that out. But initially the approach has to be as one would deal with another member of the body of Christ.

Thus, Paul was encouraging the church to give people the benefit of any doubt that might exist. What was done in discipline was to be done in tenderness and compassion, seeking the restoration of the one who was sinning, and not their final departure from the church.

It is important that we remember the words of James 5:19, 20 when we are dealing with a brother or sister who is in sin.

We might feel that Paul was making a mountain out of mole hill in dealing with such a sin as is mentioned here, but we need to remember that the slightest deviation from the Word of God is always very serious. In addition, one sin will inevitably lead to others, and sin in one person can easily spread through a whole church. So sin must never be taken lightly. It is infinitely important that we all be walking in step with each other because we are walking in step with the Word of God.

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THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

February 28, 1994

Intro: These three verses bring us to the end of this epistle.

We have seen that Paul had three things that he was concerned about which led to the writing of this epistle:

- 1) In chapter 1: the trials the church in Thessalonica was experiencing.
- 2) In chapter 2: the false teaching that had come their way regarding the day of the Lord.
- 3) In chapter 3: the need to discipline those who were not working, evidently because they believed that the coming of the Lord was imminent, and so had become busybodies, interfering in other people's lives.

His tone has been very loving and gracious, but very clear. It is apparent that the Devil did not take long to do what he could to hinder a work which had enjoyed such special blessing from the Lord. It should be a reminder to us that we can always expect Satanic opposition wherever the Lord is pleased to bless.

But now we come to his conclusion. In the outline I have called it a BENEDICTION AND CONCLUSION. What Paul wrote in these three verses should not be considered as just a usual conclusion, but a close examination of them will show that he was expressing his dependence on the Lord to preserve the work in Thessalonica and to continue His blessing upon them both individually and as a church. It is good for us to remember that the Holy Spirit guided the Apostle Paul in writing these last three verses just as much as He did in the writing of all that Paul had written before. Therefore, it is good for us to take special note of what Paul said.

Spurgeon had this to say about Paul's words here:

When the heart is full of love it finds the hand too feeble for its desires. Hence it seeks relief in intercession and benediction; wishing, praying and blessing where it cannot actually effect its loving purpose. The apostle would have done for the Thessalonians all the good that was conceivable had it been in his power, but his wishes far outstripped his abilities, and therefore he betook himself to interceding for them, and to invoking the blessing of the Lord and Master whom he served.

And then Spurgeon added this word of exhortation:

Here is a lesson for us in the art of doing good; as we lengthen the eyesight with the telescope, as we send our words afar by the telegraph, so let us extend out ability to do good by the constant use of intercessory prayer.

And then Spurgeon added this:

The slenderness of our power to bless others will be no detriment to them if it lead us to lay hold upon the eternal strength, for that will bring into the field a superior power to bless, and our infirmity will only make space for the display of divine grace (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol. 23, p. 145).

Thus we can see that these last three verses, as short as they are, contain some very important lessons for us.

3:16 The great burden that was upon our Lord's heart for His people, according to what we can learn from His prayer in John 17 was that they would be one. If this were to be realized, then it would require that peace prevail. But where there are differences and disagreements, there really can be no peace.

We have looked at three specific situations in the church at Thessalonica: their trials, their confusion about the day of the Lord, and the people in the church who were walking disorderly. Each one had the potential for destroying the unity of the church, and all three together could have put an end to the work entirely. But Paul also knew that the Lord would not let that happen. However, he did not just rest in the sovereignty of God; he keenly felt that he should be praying for them. And so this is what he was doing as he brought his epistle to a close, and what he intended to keep on doing as he continued on with his ministry in other places.

Only the Lord can give a church peace. There are always people who want to have their own way, or who always want to be in the spotlight. There are those who feel that the church does not have the right kind of leadership, and therefore are critical. Our Bibles give us many illustrations of things which took place among the people of God in the past, both in Israel and in the church, things which had the potential for disrupting the work of the Lord. There is hardly a request that we need to pray for our churches more than these requests with which Paul concluded this epistle. We have a continuing need for peace!

Paul spoke of our Lord (and he must have been referring to the Lord Jesus Christ), as "the Lord of peace." Actually all Three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned in Scripture as having to do with peace. For example, we have Heb. 13:20 which begins, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus..." And then we know that "peace" is a part of the fruit of the Spirit according to Gal. 5:22. Our Lord said to His disciples while they were together in the Upper Room, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you..." (John 14:27). And then the last recorded word which John has given us before the Lord and the disciples got to Gethsemane was, "These things have I spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace..." (John 16:33).

So there can be no doubt but that the Three Persons of the Godhead want us to have peace; They want us to be peaceful in our hearts and in our relationships with each other.

What does it mean to have peace?

It means for things to be harmonious within us and among us, not in turmoil. It cannot mean an absence of trouble because we are "born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards" (Job 5:7). The Lord asleep in the ship in the midst of the storm, is a great picture of peace. Peace does not mean that we are indifferent to difficulties and problems, but it means that we are resting in the Lord, knowing that He is in control and that He will work all things together for good. Peace calls for submission and humility of heart. Sin produces turmoil; grace produces peace. But all of us should know by now that only the Lord can give us peace. Paul was not praying just that the Lord would offer it to them, but that He would "give" it to them.

But look at the rest of the verse. Sometimes we have reason to feel that Paul was not realistic because of the way he prayed. And yet he was very

realistic, always true to life. And here he prayed that the Lord would give them "peace always by all means."

Let us think, first, about that word "always." One commentator said that this means not intermittently, not just now and then when some special need arises, "not periodically," but "always" (Eadie, p. 322). We all know what it means to have peace sometimes, but what about "always"?

Now if the Lord is to give us peace "always," and we can only get it from Him, then it means that we need to stay close by Him. This calls for a deepening and a strengthening of our fellowship with Him. This means that we cannot afford to neglect our Bibles. The Psalmist said, "Great peace have they which love thy law [thy Word]: and nothing shall offend them" (Psa. 119:165). There is no such thing as fellowship with the Lord if we are neglecting to read our Bibles and to meditate on what we read.

It also means prayer. Paul was praying for peace, and we need to pray for peace. Paul always prayed that the people of God would have peace. We pray that the Lord will take our trials away, but He wants us to learn what it means to have peace in the midst of our trials. Paul was speaking of his own personal peace when he told the Philippians in his letter to them, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11). That is peace!

But it was not just "peace always," but "by all means."

This means, in every way. I have already mentioned the Word and prayer. More of our peace comes through the Word and prayer than from any other source. But in going to the Word, we find God, we find Christ, we find the Holy Spirit. And this is where Isaiah's words in Isa. 26:3, 4 become so important: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace..."

That verse also teaches us that peace comes through trusting the Lord. We don't have peace as long as we are trying to get the Lord to do things our way, but when we surrender to Him, and trust Him to do what is best for us.

Paul's prayer sounds a little like the prayer that Aaron was to pray for the children of Israel. You find it in Num. 6:24-26:

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee:
The Lord make his face shine upon thee,
and be gracious unto thee:
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee,
and give thee peace.

Do you remember the story of Hannah and how she prayed for a child? On one visit to Shiloh she was praying silently and Eli thought she was drunk. But she told him that she wasn't drunk; she was only pouring out her heart to the Lord. Somehow Eli knew that the Lord had heard her and was going to answer her, and so he said, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him" (1 Sam. 7:17). The following verse tells us that Hannah "went her way," and that "her countenance was no more sad." That is peace. She had peace through answered prayer.

There is so much more that could be said about peace, but let me go on to the last part of verse 16 where Paul added, "The Lord be with you all."

This is not to be separated from Paul's first petition about peace, but is a vital part of it. But why would Paul pray that the Lord would be with them when the Lord had told His disciples before He went back to heaven, "And, lo, I am with you always [all the days], even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). And we can all take comfort in what the Lord said to Joshua in Joshua 1:9 because it is quoted for us in Heb. 13:5: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." The Lord is always with us; He will never leave us. Why then did Paul pray, "The Lord be with you all"?

He was praying that they would see the evidence in their lives that the Lord was on their side, working for them, blessing them, meeting their needs, and keeping their hearts in peace.

The best explanation in Scripture that I have found of what it means to have the Lord with us is in what the Lord said to Jacob when he was leaving home to get away from Esau. On that night when he had stones for his pillow, he dreamed of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, and the Lord was standing at the top of the ladder. But one thing that the Lord said to Jacob that night was this:

And, behold, I am with thee,
and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest,
and will bring thee again into this land;
for I will not leave thee, until I have done
that which I have spoken to thee of (Gen. 28:15).

Jacob had done some wrong things, and his mother had helped him. But the Lord met with Jacob to assure him that he would be with him to help him, to bless him, and ultimately would bring him back home a different man! How gracious the Lord is -- on our side, too, many times when we least deserve it! "With you" - on your side. Cf. Psa. 124.

If we really want to see what it means to have the Lord with us, then we need to be careful to walk in obedience to Him. David could have peace even facing death because you will remember that he said in Psalm 23,

Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.. (Psa. 23:4).

The presence of the Lord assures us of peace.

But let us move on to verse 17.

3:17 We learned in 2 Thess. 2:2 that somebody had written to the church and indicated in some way that it was a letter from Paul. But it was not! And it was that letter which had contributed to the confusion that the people had over the day of the Lord. It seems that Paul did not write his epistles; he dictated them to someone else, probably because he had poor eyesight. But he always signed them. And so he was making sure that they knew that this epistle was really from him! That meant not only that it was a genuine Pauline epistle, but, since he was an apostle, this meant that they were to accept his letter as from God, inspired by God, written under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they were to accept it as the very Word of God, and it would serve to guide them, along with the first epistle, as long as they lived. They would have had no idea that almost 2,000 years later a group of Christians in Portland, Oregon would be going through this same letter eagerly seeking to learn what Paul told them so we could get help from it, too.

So this letter was to be read and re-read, and probably was many, many times, until it was written upon the hearts of the people. May its truth be written upon our hearts, too.

And now we come to the last verse:

3:18. The letter began with grace (see 1:2), and it ends with grace. And so we conclude as we began, with both grace and peace. Surely this should tell us how much we need them both, and need them continually.

I won't repeat what I said before about grace except to remind you that the grace of God means God's undeserved blessing given to strengthen us. We need to be reminded every day that there is not a single blessing which the Lord has given us, or ever will give us, which we deserve. But we also need to remember that we are trophies of grace! It is only by the grace of God that we are what we are, and it will only be by the grace of God that some day we will be like the Lord Jesus. It is only by God's grace that we are able to please Him and to glorify Him and to worship Him.

And so we all need grace, and need it every day. "Amen." So be it! Here is another prayer which we can pray for each other, and be absolutely certain that we are praying according to the will of God. And that assures us of an answer. Paul knew the peace of Christ, and He knew the grace of Christ. And it was always his prayer that the people of God would find their greatest happiness day after day in the enjoyment of those same blessings from the Lord.

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