

2 Thessalonians

WRITER

The author of this epistle is Paul, the apostle, who also wrote 1 Thessalonians (See "Writer" in intro. to Rm and 1 Th). However, as 1 Thessalonians, the letter comes from Paul, Silas and Timothy because all three worked in the beginning and early edification of the Thessalonian disciples (1:1). Therefore, when considering the pronoun "we" in the letter, we must remember that Paul, Silas and Timothy are all included. Though the message is personally from the thoughts of the apostle Paul by the direction of the Holy Spirit (3:17), Paul wants the Thessalonians to know that all three evangelists were involved in the sending of the message. All three evangelists wanted to express their concerns in reference to the thoughts that are included in the letter.

DATE

This letter was probably written shortly after 1 Thessalonians was written from Corinth. Being on his second missionary journey, Paul possibly wrote the letter sometime between A.D. 50 and 52.

THEME

The theme of the letter is expressed in 2:15: "*Therefore, brethren, stand firm and hold the traditions that you were taught, whether by word or our letter.*" It was Paul's intention through the letter to exhort the Thessalonians to stand firm on the inspired teachings that they had already been taught by himself and other prophets.

PURPOSE

The Thessalonians were enduring persecution as they preached the gospel in their area. In their desire for relief from persecution, they had come to some wrong conclusions concerning the final coming of Jesus. Therefore, Paul wrote in chapter 1 a message of comfort for them in their time of persecution (See 1 Th 2:14-16). In chapter 2 he wrote in order to correct some misconcep-

tions concerning the final coming of Jesus (See 1 Th 4:13 – 5:11). In chapter 3 he wrote in order to help them deal with some who had resigned from their jobs and were living disorderly by living off the rest of the disciples (See 1 Th 4:9-12). Since some of the first converts were possibly wealthy (At 17:4), it would have been easy for some to take advantage of the wealth of others. Paul was informed concerning this disorderly conduct, and thus, he wrote to stop the feeding of the lazy brothers in order to encourage them to return to their jobs (3:6-12). Their dysfunctional gospel living inspired the letter.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The church came into existence in Thessalonica through the preaching of Paul, Silas and Timothy. The first letter had already been delivered to them. As a follow up to the first letter, this letter was written in order to continue the nurturing of the saints in the behavior of Christian principles. We do not know who delivered this letter. Possibly, Paul sent either Silas or Timothy back to Thessalonica in order to deliver this message and continue the nurturing of the saints (See “Historical Background” in intro. to 1 Th).

The Day of the Lord

(1:1 – 2:17)

Outline: (1) Greetings (1:1,2), (2) God's final judgment (1:3-12), (2) The lawless one (2:1-12), (3) Faithful and strong (2:13-17)

Chapter 1

GREETINGS

1:1,2 Since Paul, Silas and Timothy worked together to preach the gospel in Thessalonica, then this letter is from all three evangelists. All three had the gift of teaching, and thus, we would assume that the Holy Spirit spoke through all three in order to deal with some specific problems that prevailed among the disciples' relationships with one another. However, in 3:17 Paul informs us that the letter comes specifically from him. If either Silas or Timothy delivered the first letter, then we could assume that on their return to Paul in Corinth, they sat down and rehearsed the things that needed to be said in

this second letter. The greeting from all three, therefore, emphasizes the point that the letter is the result of a unified effort from all three men who sought to continue the edification of the Thessalonian disciples (See comments 1 Th 1:1,2).

GOD'S FINAL JUDGMENT

1:3 Faith grows exceedingly: These Christians continued to grow spiritually in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (2:13; 1 Th 1:2; 2 Pt 3:18). Their faith toward God was manifested by their zealous work. They were Christians who did not stagnate. They continued the labors in their lives that were stimulated by the grace of God (1 Th 1:6-9; see comments 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15). **Love ... abounds:** Not only did they continue to respond to God through obedient faith, their loving response toward one another also grew (1 Th 4:9; see comments 1 Jn 4:19).

1:4 Glory in you among the churches: When Christians continue their outreach, regardless of persecution and hardships, they stand as models for others to follow (2 Co 7:14; 1 Th 2:19; see 1 Th 2:14; Rv 2:10; see comments Mt 5:10-12; 13:20,21). Paul thus praised these disciples before others because they did not allow their hardships to stop them from their outreach to evangelize their area. Neither did they allow hardships to stop them from loving one another.

1:5 Manifest evidence: The persecutions they were enduring were the indication of their faith (Ph 1:28; see comments At 14:22; 1 Pt 4:16). The persecutions were the evidence that they were God's flock, and thus, God would eventually avenge those who harmed His flock (Mt 5:10-12; see Dt 32:35). Since the church is the work of God, then those who would oppose the church will receive the just condemnation of God. **Worthy of the kingdom:** The Thessalonians' perseverance under persecution manifested their faithfulness to God, and thus, their persecution proved them to be God's children who had submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus. As a community of disciples, they were the manifestation on earth of God's kingdom reign from heaven. Paul's statement here manifests the difference between the kingdom

and church. As a church of disciples, they were enduring persecutions on earth because they had responded to the reigning King Jesus from heaven (See comments Mt 16:18,19). Because the disciples had submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus, they were willing to suffer on behalf of their King (1 Th 2:14).

1:6 Just thing: It is a just thing for God to avenge those who have persecuted His people (Rm 2:5; 12:19; Rv 6:10). God's justice stands without accusation in judgment because those who set themselves against His work have set themselves against Him. It is not the right of Christians who are persecuted to seek revenge, for those who have persecuted them have actually persecuted the work of God through them. Persecution is against the body of Christ, and thus, it is the work of God to render justice to those who would harm His people. Christians, therefore, should not allow persecution to embitter them against others. They should patiently wait until God's appointed time when He will bring punishment upon all persecutors of the church. The time when God brings judgment upon persecutors of His flock occurs both in time and at the end of time (See intro. to Rv).

1:7 Rest with us: Since the word "rest" (*anesin*) is here used as a noun with reference not only to peace of mind in this world, but specifically to the eternal rest of heaven that is yet to come (Hb 4:9; Rv 14:13). In addition to Paul and his company, those in Thessalonica who were troubled would together, with them, receive the eternal rest of heaven when Jesus comes again. This is the hope of the Christian who seeks to remain faithful in this world regardless of the hardships he must endure. The Christian's desire for the eternal rest beyond this world moves him to make every sacrifice and endure every hardship in order to rest with Jesus for eternity (See comments Rm 8:18). **Jesus will be revealed from heaven:** Paul has in mind the final coming of Jesus when He will descend from heaven in order to conclude this world (1 Th 3:13; 4:16; Jd 14). When Jesus comes again, His coming will not be a coming that is either secret or invisible (At 1:11; 1 Th 4:16). He will be manifested from heaven with a shout and the sound of a trumpet. **Mighty angels:** The

adjective “mighty” emphasizes the fact that those coming with Jesus will be invested with the power to accomplish what will transpire during the events of the final coming. No matter how strong we perceive the forces of this world or the powers of Satan, Jesus will openly overwhelm all power by the authority of His kingdom reign (Ep 1:20-22; see comments Hb 2:7,8).

1:8 In flaming fire: The metaphor here would indicate the consuming power and judgment by which Jesus will come in order to render vengeance to those who have persecuted His body (See 1 Co 3:13; Hb 12:29; 2 Pt 3:7; Rv 21:8). The action of fire is to consume, and thus in this context, the work of Jesus in His final coming will be to consume the unrighteous persecutors of His body (See comments Mt 10:28). Their consumption will be their destruction. **Those who do not know God:** This statement could be understood in two ways. Reference could be to those who do not have a knowledge of God. These would be those who have given up a knowledge of God in order to follow after gods they have, in either ignorance or rebellion, created after their own imaginations and desires (See comments Rm 1:20-28). In a similar manner, a second understanding would be a reference to those who pretend to know the one true and living God, but refuse to behave according to His will. These do not know God because they live contrary to the will of God. In either of the preceding cases, one cannot be saved on the basis of creating his own god or willfully living contrary to the one true and living God. If one does not live according to the will of God, he does not know God. **Do not obey the gospel:** The second group of people upon whom judgment will come are those who have not obeyed the gospel. The gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (1 Co 15:1-4). By immersion one obeys the historical event of the gospel (See comments Rm 6:3-6). Therefore, those who have not obeyed the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus cannot be saved when Jesus comes again (Rm 2:8; 1 Pt 4:17). Paul affirms in this passage, therefore, that those who have given up a knowledge of God, or refuse to have a knowledge of God in their lives, will not be called into eternal glory. Those

who have had a chance to hear the gospel, but have refused, will also not be brought into heavenly dwelling.

1:9 Everlasting destruction: The word “everlasting” is from *aionion*. The word is used in Mark 3:29, Hebrews 5:9, Hebrews 6:2 and Hebrews 9:12 to refer to something that is accomplished, but has unending results (See also Mt 25:46; Jd 7). There are two ways to consider what Paul here reveals. The traditional understanding of the passage is that the destruction is a process that will go on without end. In other words, those who have never had a chance to obey the gospel will be in a state of endless destruction because they did not obey the gospel. But more logically, there is the interpretation of referring to *aionion* as the adjective of destruction as used in the preceding suggested references. Punishment is certain. However, the punishment ends in the destruction of body, soul and spirit. The result of the destruction cannot be changed. The consequence of the destruction is without end. The interpretation, therefore, is according to Jesus’ statement of Matthew 10:28: “*And do not fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [gehenna].*” Once the punishment has met the sin, then destruction is the end of those who have not known God or obeyed the gospel. What Paul is saying, therefore, is that the process of destroying will not go on without end. What will go on without end is the result of the destruction. The destruction will be complete and final. This interpretation thus harmonizes with the just judgment of God. God is not fiendish in that He preserves the unrighteous in punishment that far exceeds their crimes. Once just punishment has been rendered, then termination results. If this is not the case, then one would have difficulty in defending the justice of God after billions of years in eternity while the condemned are still burning in an endless hell. **Presence of the Lord:** The unending existence of any person is possible only in the presence of the Lord. Only God is indigenous in eternity, that is, He only is of the nature to exist without beginning or ending. Therefore, any who would seek to exist without end must be in His eternal presence, for He is the source

of eternity. Outside His presence, therefore, nothing can exist without end, for God alone has the power to continue our existence.

1:10 When He will come: This will be the last day (Jn 6:44; 12:48). It will be in this day that the last and final judgment, and the termination of this world, will occur (2 Pt 3:9,10; see comments Hb 9:27). **Admired:** Jesus will be openly glorified by the obedience of those who trusted in Him. Since the redeemed will finally realize their salvation in the last day, it will be then that Jesus will be fully understood to have been the Savior of the world. The rejoicing of the saints will result in their glorification of Jesus for accomplishing their salvation on the cross (See Is 49:3; Jn 17:10; 1 Th 2:12).

1:11,12 Pray always for you: In the prayers of the evangelist are those he has led to obedience of the gospel. In this case, Paul prayed that the Thessalonians conduct their lives worthy of the gospel by which they were called (Ph 1:27; Cl 1:12; see 1 Th 3:11-13; 5:23,24). **Work of faith:** They had a faith that worked (1 Th 1:3). It was not a dead faith (See comments Js 2:14-26). **Christ may be glorified:** When Christians conduct their lives after the manner of Jesus, Jesus is glorified in the community (Jn 17:10; Gl 1:24; Cl 3:17; 1 Pt 1:7). Christians are thus glorified in the eyes of God. But if Christians do not conduct themselves after a godly manner, the name of God is blasphemed. Every Christian who lives a rebellious life thus brings shame on the body of Christ. Paul's point is that our Christian behavior must manifest that our lives are about Jesus, not about ourselves. We do not live to bring glory to the church, for the church is composed of us. It is the purpose of the church (the obedient) to bring glory to Christ, not to the members. The obedient must live in a manner that would bring glory to Jesus.

Chapter 2

THE LAWLESS ONE

There is little room for any dogmatic interpretations of this context. There are two things to remember when considering that to which Paul was referring. (1) Paul uses some apocalyptic language in order to convey the

nature and work of the lawless one (See “Style of Writing” in intro. to Rv). (2) It is evident that the Thessalonians knew what or who Paul was discussing because he had personally spoken to them of the things of this context while he was in Thessalonica (vs 5). Various views have been proposed by Bible students concerning the identity of, or that to which Paul refers when he used the term “the man of sin.” Some of the major views are the following:

1. There are those who have affirmed that reference here is to a specific apostate religion, specifically the popes and the Roman Catholic Church. Papal infallibility, Catholic claims to miracles, and the Catholic Church’s apparent existence until Jesus comes in His final coming are points that are emphasized to support this theory. However, the complete lawlessness of the “man of sin” does pose a problem with this interpretation. The Catholic Church does not reject divine order in the lives of men, and thus, it would not be considered completely “lawless.”

2. Others have affirmed that the man of sin is a personification of the Roman Empire and its emperor worship (See intro. to Rv). Reference may be to Nero and to a long succession of persecuting emperors who followed after the nature of Nero’s personal vendetta against Christians. Paul may have written, therefore, in an apocalyptic manner in order to warn against state persecution that would have resulted if the letter had been discovered by Roman officials. One favorable point of this understanding of the man of sin is the fact that Nero, as well as other Caesars of Rome after him, claimed to be deity, and thus, demanded worship from the subjects of the Roman Empire. We must keep in mind that the lawless one would be in existence at the time of the coming of Jesus. There are two “comings” of Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus would come in judgment upon national Israel in A.D. 70. He would also come in judgment of the world at the end of time. If the coming about which Paul refers is the in-time judgment on national Israel, then the interpretation that reference in the context is to the Roman Empire has some credibility.

3. Another interpretation that is promoted by Bible students is that the man of sin is Satan. It is affirmed that Satan's work will continue and increase until the end of the world. Near the end of the world, the restraining power of the gospel will be taken away because it will not be preached, and thus, Satan will be allowed to deceive the nations (Compare comments Rv 20:1-6). The problem with this view is that the man of sin will conduct himself "according to" the work of Satan (vs 9). Therefore, the man of sin is the result of Satan's deceptions. He is not Satan himself.

4. Still another view of the man of sin is that he stands for the general influence of sin through anyone who would assume the work of Satan in the world. Anyone who would set himself against the work of God is a "man of sin." In other words, Paul had no particular person in view. He spoke generically, and thus, he considered all who would work against Christ to be working after the will of Satan (Compare 1 Jn 2:18,23; 4:1-3). However, one problem with this view is that Paul seems to be speaking concerning a specific individual in the context. From reading the context, it does not seem that he is speaking in generalities.

5. There is also the view that the movement of anarchy that is here portrayed by Paul refers to the rebellion of national Israel within the Roman Empire. Insurrectionists were already at work in Palestine in their efforts to liberate Israel from Roman occupation. The movement of Israelite nationalism had already set itself against the church. Now it was setting itself against the law and order of the Roman State. Paul, as well as the other New Testament evangelists and apostles, had discussed with the early Christians the prophecy of Jesus that is recorded in Matthew 24 (See comments). National Israel was headed for destruction as a result of its rejection of the Messiah and rebellion against Rome. Whether this is the subject of this context might be debatable. However, this view would historically fit the context of the early church as the time was approaching for the coming of the Lord in judgment on national Israel that would lead to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The consum-

mation of national Israel was a subject of the prophets, specifically Ezekiel and Daniel, and thus, the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the end of Israel was in the mind of Paul as he wrote these words.

Regardless of which view is taken concerning the interpretation of the man of sin, Bible students must recognize the great emphasis on apostasy in the Bible, and particularly, in this context. The time of the apostasy about which the Bible speaks is often difficult to determine. However, the fact that the Bible speaks of apostasy should alert the believer concerning the danger of such in the church, and specifically, concerning his own need to make his calling and election sure (See Mt 7:15-23; Mk 13:22,23; At 20:29-31; 1 Tm 4:1-5; 2 Tm 4:3-5; 2 Pt 2:1-3,20-22; 3:1-7; Rv 17:3-6; 18:1-5). Concerning the apostasy of this context, Paul views it as already in the process of affecting the church (vs 7). It had not yet reached its climax, nevertheless, he wrote in order to alert the disciples to the fact of its existence.

2:1 Coming of our Lord: When studying this and similar contexts that refer to the “coming of the Lord,” we must keep in mind that the phrase “coming of the Lord” should first be interpreted by the context in which it is used. This phrase is taken from judgment language of the Old Testament. It refers to the coming of the Lord in order to bring to a close that which is judged. The Lord came in judgment on kingdoms in the Old Testament. Jesus speaks of the Lord’s coming in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (See comments Mt 24:3). James referred to this coming to be “at hand” at the time he wrote in the middle of the 60s (See comments Js 5:7,8). When the early evangelists went about establishing the disciples in the faith, it is certain that they spoke of the Lord’s prophecy of His coming in judgment on Jerusalem, which coming would be for the purpose of bringing about a physical conclusion to national Israel. While Paul was in Thessalonica, he spoke of the “coming of the Lord Jesus Christ” (vs 5). However, in the context of this chapter he seems to be referring to the coming of the Lord at the end of time, which event they thought had already happened (vs 2). In view of his earlier discussion concerning

the coming of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, it is evident that Paul here seeks to correct some misunderstandings that resulted from the first letter concerning the final coming of the Lord at the end of time. **Together unto Him:** We will gather together to the Lord in the air at the final coming (1 Th 4:17). We will not gather to Him somewhere here on earth.

2:2 Not be quickly shaken in mind or troubled: They must not be mentally or emotionally confused by any false understandings or interpretations that the Lord had already come in His final coming. The final coming was yet in the future. We must keep in mind when discussing the final coming of Jesus that the New Testament does not teach an imminent final return of Jesus in the lifetime of the early disciples. The New Testament does not teach that Jesus was going to come in His final coming in the lifetime of the 1st century disciples. The Holy Spirit did not deceive the New Testament writers into communicating to the early church a message that assumed that Jesus was coming in His final coming in their lifetime. Therefore, if the New Testament did not teach such in the 1st century, then it does not teach such today. Jesus is coming. However, no one knows when He will come in His final coming. In this and the following chapter Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to live the Christian life and work with their hands. Christians must always be prepared for the coming of Jesus. However, speculation concerning the time of His final coming is futile. There will be no signs of the time of His coming. **By spirit:** There may have been false prophets in their midst who were affirming by their supposed gift of prophecy that Jesus was soon to appear in His final coming. They may have misunderstood the first letter, and thus, confused the Thessalonians concerning what was actually said in that letter (Compare 1 Th 5:19-21; 1 Jn 4:1; Rv 2:2). **By word:** They must not be led to believe that either Paul, Silas or Timothy verbally communicated to them, while in their presence, that Jesus' final coming was imminent. **By letter:** This would be a reference to 1 Thessalonians. They must not twist what he said in the first letter by affirming that Paul wrote that Jesus was

coming in His final coming in their lifetime. **Has come:** This is past tense, and thus, some were erroneously suggesting that Jesus had already come. There would thus be no more personal comings of Jesus in the future. This teaching was possibly based on the coming of Jesus during His earthly ministry, thus assuming that there would be no more personal appearances of Jesus.

2:3 First come a falling away: Reference is to a specific and great apostasy. Paul does not define the apostasy, neither does he specify when it would occur. What he does say is that the coming of Jesus would not happen until this apostasy took place (Compare comments 1 Tm 4:1). **The man of lawlessness:** This would be the “man of sin.” This is the lawless one of verse 8. Since Jesus had not come in His final coming by the time these words were written, then it is difficult to determine both the apostasy about which Paul speaks and the individual or concept of the man of sin. Since he is using apocalyptic language, it could be assumed that he is not referring to a specific individual, but to an institution or general environment of sin in which Christians would dwell. He could be referring to a body of men or government power that would be characterized by lawlessness in reference to God’s law. It is certain that the Thessalonians knew what or who was under discussion here. They would also have known more information as to when these things would take place, for Paul discussed these matters with them while he was in Thessalonica (vs 5). **Revealed:** The unrighteous heart of Judas Iscariot was revealed when the occasion presented itself for him to make a decision concerning the betrayal of Jesus (See Jn 17:12). In the same manner, the unregenerate heart of the man of sin would be revealed when his restraint is taken away (vs 6), and thus, he would have the opportunity to reveal his heart. Some Bible students have suggested that this is the “little time” of Revelation 20:3 (See comments Rv 20:3).

2:4 Paul here explains the nature and practice of the man of lawlessness. His character is definitely against the work of God through the church. He would demand worship from men. During the latter part of his reign,

Nero assumed deity, and thus, demanded worship from the subjects of the Roman Empire. Other Caesars of Rome who followed him also claimed deity, and thus, demanded worship. The Christians' refusal to pay homage to the Caesars as lord was considered insurrection by the Roman government, and thus, Christians were tried for treason and sentenced to death. This could be the great apostasy about which Paul speaks. Many Christians may have succumbed to the pressures of emperor worship, and thus, fell away from Christ. The Bible student must keep in mind that our interpretation must be seated in the lives of those who were the first recipients of the inspired letters. In this case, we would thus assume that Paul was not only correcting misunderstandings concerning the coming of the Lord, he was preparing the Thessalonian disciples for difficult times to come. **Temple:** The man of sin would assume the position of worship among men, which worship is due only to God. This is what the Caesars of Rome did during the years of great persecution of Christianity.

2:5 On his initial visit to Thessalonica, Paul spoke of these things in order to establish the new converts. We would assume, therefore, that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him some things in the near future of the 1st century church that would greatly affect the lives of the Thessalonians. Since Jesus had prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in A.D. 70, then we must assume that the early evangelists spoke of these things to the early Christians since many of them were Jews (See comments Mt 24). John wrote of the great persecution that would come through the onslaught of the Roman government. The entire book of Revelation was written in order to encourage Christians concerning this great persecution that was to come in the lives of the early Christians. Though we do not completely understand the personal message about which Paul spoke concerning things to come in the lives of the Thessalonians, that would personally affect their lives, we would be cautious about applying statements in this context to any situation of the church since the 1st century. Since Paul does not give written revelation in this epistle con-

cerning those things about which he personally spoke to the Thessalonians while he was in Thessalonica, then we would correctly assume that what he spoke to them concerning the man of sin and his deeds does not directly apply to us today. If they did apply to us today, then certainly he would have explained in this letter that which he had personally explained to the Thessalonians since his teachings on these matters would have applied to us as much as the early Christians.

2:6 You know what holds him back: We are not told what was restraining the man of sin. However, the Thessalonians knew because Paul had personally talked to them concerning these matters. Because Paul writes cautiously here, some Bible students have affirmed that he was referring to the Roman government that was restraining Jewish anarchy in different parts of the Roman Empire. We do know when Jewish anarchy began to rise in the Roman Empire. We do know that the Jewish anarchy developed to the point that the Roman government decided to solve the Jewish problem of insurrection by the destruction of national Israel in A.D. 70. **In his time:** We would assume that God was working in this situation. He was controlling the time when the spirit of lawlessness would be revealed.

2:7 Mystery of lawlessness: Paul seems to be generic in reference to the lawlessness that he mentions in this passage. It is no longer a "man of lawlessness," but the "mystery of lawlessness." However, if he speaks of an individual, the individual would represent a spirit of lawlessness among many men, and thus, be the leader of a movement against that which was lawful. The movements of lawlessness are usually not the result of one individual. Individuals only become the instigators of a mood that prevails in a particular society. Therefore, Paul's reference to the man of sin would be a personification of a spirit of anarchy that existed in the Roman Empire. At the time Paul wrote this letter, Jewish insurrection was building in the Roman Empire. It intensified until Rome eventually decided to crush national Israel. This consequently led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. **He who now restrains:** He who restrains the law-

less one is here referred to with a masculine pronoun. However, in verse 6, he, or "it," was referred to with the neuter word "what." Therefore, it is difficult to determine if the restraining force is a person, power or influence. It could be that the lawless one represents a movement of anarchy against law. That which restrains is the rule of Roman law. Lawlessness is thus restrained until the particular movement is emboldened to defy law and order by breaking forth into open rebellion.

2:8 *The lawless one:* This one works against all that is holy. He or it is against Christ and His body. Anyone or any institution in history that works against God can be associated with the nature of the man of sin and his movement against the church (Compare comments Mt 24:12). Paul does not indicate how long it will be until this one is revealed, or what will be the duration of his influence over those whom he deceives. Regardless of the influence of the force of evil, however, Jesus will easily destroy him, or it, with the power of His coming. This is the message of comfort that Paul wants to communicate to the Thessalonians. There is no physical or spiritual power that is too great that Jesus cannot destroy with the breath of His word (See comments Rm 8:31-39).

2:9 *The working of Satan:* Satan is personified in the work of any person who sets himself against the work of God (Compare Rv 20:1-3). He works through the deception of men who refuse to have God in either their knowledge or behavior. ***Deceiving:*** This word should modify power, signs and wonders. Satan's works are never real miracles simply because there would be no purpose of God to allow Satan to do such (See comments Mt 24:24; At 8:9-13; 19:18,19). Agents of Satan work counterfeit tricks in order to deceive the gullibly innocent who are as children tossed to and fro by every wind of hearsay happenings (Ep 4:14). People who are not grounded in the word of God are easily caught up in the excitement of receiving and propagating fanciful phenomenon that tickle the ears of those who are ignorant of the word of God (See comments 1 Tm 4:1; 2 Tm 4:3,4). When one is curiously led to believe that Satan is in the world working miracles as Christ and the apostles, he should re-

member that all supernatural power originates from God. There is no eternal power other than God, and thus, all supernatural power that is revealed to man must find its origin in God. We must remember that Satan's work in the life of Job was under the control of God (See Jb 1:11,12; 2:3,4; 42:11). If Satan had supernatural power of himself, then he would be as God. He would thus exist parallel with God in eternity. This is the doctrine of dualism, and the Bible teaches no such doctrine (Compare comments Cl 1:16). It is an accusation against the nature of the unchanging God to believe that He allows Satan to nullify His miraculous confirmation of His message and messengers by allowing Satan to do the same with his representatives.

2:10 Deception of wickedness: The method by which Satan uses the lawless one to gain a following is through deception (Mt 24:5,24). We must never underestimate the ability of an individual to deceive another person. Neither should we underestimate the willingness of some to be deceived. When those who have the desire and ability to deceive are joined with those who are willing to be deceived, then Satan is at his best. Those who do not have a love of the truth will fall victim to the deceptions of witchcraft, sorcery, voodooism, scientism and a host of other efforts of deceived individuals to lead others astray after their own desires (Compare comments Cl 2:20-22). Because Satan's work is through deception, the Bible warns that Christians be not deceived (Hb 3:13). The power of Satan through deception makes it unnecessary for him to work through miracles. **The love of the truth:** This is the condition upon which one will accept the event of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (1 Co 15:1-4). If one does not accept the truth of the gospel, and subsequently obey the gospel, then he cannot be saved (1:7-9; compare Gl 3:1). All religious people who have heard the gospel, but have refused to obey the gospel, have been deceived by false religious beliefs that are created after the desires of men.

2:11 God will send them strong delusion: If one does not love and obey the truth of the gospel, then God has allowed Satan to deceive that person. God will allow any-

one to believe a lie (See 1 Tm 4:1; 2 Tm 4:3,4). God will not subjectively submit one to obey His will. Therefore, God cannot be blamed if a free-moral person chooses to believe fables and counterfeit miracles.

2:12 One will be condemned because he did not love the truth of the gospel, and thus obey the gospel. **Pleasure in wickedness:** This is the key to understanding verses 10-12. Because one has followed after the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes, and pride of life, he has rejected the direction of his life by the truth of God (See Rm 1:32; 1 Co 3:16; Hb 11:24,25). Those who make the choice to exchange the truth of God for the pleasures of this world will reap the condemnation of their souls (1:7-9). Because they will be held accountable for their choices, they will reap the consequences of their sin.

FAITHFUL & STRONG

2:13 Chosen you for salvation: They were chosen by their free-moral obedience to the gospel (vs 14). God predetermined before the creation of the world that He would choose out of the world at the end of time those who were obedient to the gospel. In the dispensation of time from Pentecost to the final coming of Jesus, it will be the church that God will choose (See comments Ep 1:4-12; 3:8-13). Therefore, those individuals who free-morally choose to be added to the church upon obedience to the gospel, will be chosen out of the world. They are thus chosen by God. Paul states that he gives thanks for their choice to become a part of those who will be chosen. **Sanctification of the Spirit:** Cleansing by the Spirit is something that takes place in the spiritual realm in one's relationship with God (See Jn 17:17; Ep 6:17; 1 Th 4:7). However, in this statement, the Greek article is not present with the word *pneumatōs* (spirit). Therefore, reference is probably to the spirit of man. Emphasis would thus be on the spirit of man that is sanctified and not on the Holy Spirit who does the sanctifying. Since the verse is speaking about what God does for the chosen, then it is their spirit that is sanctified. **Belief in the truth:** This is the condition upon which men are sanctified by the Spirit. Sanctification cannot take place without obedi-

ent faith whereby one obeys the truth of the gospel (See Rm 6:3-6).

2:14 Called you by our gospel: The gospel (“good news”) is the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and kingdom reign of the Son of God for our sins (See comments 1 Co 15:1-4). Through the preaching of this message by the servants of God, God calls men out of their problems of spiritual and physical death. In view of the fact that men are called to obedience through the preaching of the gospel, they are not called by a direct work of the Holy Spirit (See comments At 8:26,29). People are not called, therefore, if the gospel is not preached. They cannot be called unless those who have been entrusted with the word of reconciliation preach the gospel (2 Co 5:17-21). **Obtaining of the glory:** Those who have obeyed the gospel, have come into Christ wherein they have eternal life (1 Jn 5:1,2,11). They will eventually come into the glory of Christ in heaven (See comments Rm 8:18; 1 Pt 5:10).

2:15 Hold the traditions: Paul does not speak here of human religious traditions (See comments Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:1-9). The traditions of this context were the teachings concerning discipleship that result in godly living (See 3:6; Rm 6:17; 1 Co 11:2; Jd 3). Since it is a tendency of men to construct religious behavior after their own traditions, faithful Christians must continually seek to direct their lives by the word of God. Christians must know the Bible well enough to separate human religious traditions from that which is the will of God. When religious people lose sight of the will of God through ignorance of the Bible, they will be led by traditions, and thus, led away from God (See Hs 4:6).

2:16 Lord Jesus ... God our Father: There are those who promote the teaching that Jesus alone is all that God is. However, this statement of Paul clearly distinguishes between these two manifestations of the one God. Jesus was God manifested in the flesh, while the Father remained in the spirit (Jn 1:14; 4:24; see comments Mt 3:16,17). In this one sentence of verses 16,17, the verbs “comfort” and “establish” are singular. Therefore, Paul affirms the singularity of the Father and Son as one in

their work of comforting and establishing the saints. **Everlasting comfort:** God has given us comfort through the gospel. The result of our comfort will carry on throughout heavenly glory. **Through grace:** It has been through the grace of God that we are saved (Rm 5:1,2; Ep 2:1-10). When we realize that our salvation has been made possible by the grace of God, and that we need not trust in the merit of perfect obedience, then our hope is made sure. Therefore, the hope of the Christian does not rest on his ability to perfectly perform law or accumulate meritorious good works. We can have hope because we have faith in the grace of God (Ti 3:7; 1 Pt 1:3; see comments Rm 4 - 5).

2:17 Comfort ... establish: When Christians grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, they grow in comfort and are established in the faith (2 Tm 2:15; 2 Pt 3:18). It is important, therefore, that Christians grow in knowledge of God and His will, for through such knowledge their faith grows (Rm 10:17; 2 Pt 3:18). When we grow in knowledge of God, the response to such knowledge is growth in the work of God. Through our knowledge of the word of God, we understand what God did on our behalf because of His grace. This knowledge of God's work, therefore, produces an obedient response in our lives (Gl 6:10). The only guarantee against apostasy is growth. When men become idle and ignorant of the word of God, they are easily led astray by the deceptions of Satan (Compare comments Hs 4:6).

Exhortation for Discipleship (3:1-18)

Outline: (1) Request for prayer (3:1-5), (2) Christian responsibility to work (3:6-15), (3) Personal benediction (3:16-18)

Chapter 3

REQUEST FOR PRAYER

3:1,2 Pray for us: Paul, Silas and Timothy needed the prayers of the new disciples in Thessalonica (Ep 6:19). The specific thing for which Paul requested their prayers was that they may be used to spread the gospel message, while at the same time be delivered from the persecut-

ing hands of wicked men (vs 2; see Rm 15:31). Therefore, Paul's request for prayer assumes that God would work in the lives of those who ask of Him (Js 5:16). Christians must give themselves to prayer for those evangelists who have gone forth to preach the gospel. That for which Paul requested prayers from the Thessalonian disciples is that which must be mentioned in our prayers for evangelists. **All do not have faith:** Reference here is to the unbeliever who has no consideration for things that pertain to God. These are those who are antagonistic to the preaching of the gospel (See At 28:24; Rm 10:16).

3:3 The Lord is faithful: Regardless of the persecution of those who have set themselves against the work of God, Jesus will stand with all who persistently commit themselves to His work (See 1 Co 1:9; 10:13; 2 Co 1:18; 1 Th 5:24). **Establish:** The Thessalonians were strengthened through the preaching and teaching of Timothy (1 Th 3:2). They were thus being built up and established on the foundation of the word of God (At 20:32). **Protect:** One is guarded, or kept from the evil one, insofar as he voluntarily submits his life to the will of God (Jn 17:15; 2 Pt 2:9). If one willfully journeys outside the realm of God's truth, then he will be deceived by Satan, and thus, consumed by false beliefs and ungodly behavior (See 1 Pt 5:8,9).

3:4 Things we command you: Herein was Paul's confidence in the Thessalonians. As long as they continued in the inspired teachings that were given to them, they would remain established and guarded in the faith. One is thus kept safe in the Lord as he allows his life to be directed by the commandments of God (Gl 5:10; Ph 2:19,24). As long as the Thessalonians continued to walk obediently in the light (1 Jn 1:6-9), they would be guarded from evil.

3:5 Lord direct your hearts: Paul had confidence in them to continue to be obedient to his inspired instructions (1 Th 4:2; compare 2 Co 7:16). Through such instructions, Paul affirmed that they would be directed by God's love (Rm 5:5; 8:39; 2 Co 13:14; see At 20:32). **The perseverance of Christ:** If they continued in the commandments of the Lord, they would exemplify in their

lives the same perseverance and steadfastness by which Jesus conducted His life.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY TO WORK

In the following discussion, Paul commands the faithful to discipline those brethren who have quit their jobs, and thus, were living off the goodwill of others. Some had evidently come into the fellowship of the church with the thinking that they could live off the labors of others. Paul corrects this misunderstanding by teaching that when one becomes a Christian, he assumes the responsibility to be a servant to others by being responsible for his own well-being.

3:6 *Withdraw:* The faithful working disciples were to withdraw themselves from every member who could work, but would not work. They were to deal with such disciples as Paul explained in verse 10. Therefore, it is the will of the Lord that those disciples who do not work when they can work, should be withdrawn from by the church in the sense that the church should not give them food. ***Walks disorderly:*** By what he did while in Thessalonica, we understand what Paul meant by the disorderly walk. In verse 8 he explained that while he was in Thessalonica he worked with his own hands in order to support himself (1 Th 2:9; see comments At 18:3; 20:34). Therefore, we must understand what he is saying here in the context of some brethren who had quit their jobs. Their disorderly walk was that they were not working in order to support themselves. They were living off the labors of other disciples. ***The tradition:*** In this context, the tradition (example) that Paul left with the Thessalonians was that one must work with his hands in order to support his own physical needs. If a brother can work when there is work, then he has no right to ask of another brother that for which he can provide for himself through work. Those who do not work are lazy, and thus, they should not be allowed by the community of God's people to continue in their laziness. If one can work, and there is work, then he must work. This is the ethical behavior by which Christians must conduct themselves in the community. This is what Paul

commanded Christians to do (1 Th 4:11). Concerning the matter of disfellowship, Paul gives the right to the church to take action against any who would not conform to the behavioral principle of work. This would include action against the sin of laziness that was the sin of some in this context, as well as moral sins as explained in 1 Corinthians 6:9,10. It must be remembered that the law of inclusion (immersion) into the fellowship of the church is no more important than the law of exclusion (disfellowship). God has delegated the responsibility of disfellowship to the disciples as a group. He did this in order to give the disciples the right to exclude from their fellowship those who would destroy the purity of their fellowship through either their laziness, immoral living, or doctrinal heresy. Christians, therefore, must be obedient to the law of exclusion in order to prove their obedience in all things. The disciples of Jesus should not sin against God by refusing to exercise this commandment of God that has been given to them by God. Therefore, good leaders will not allow the community of the saints to sin by neglecting to carry out this commandment to disfellowship sinning disciples.

3:7 *Did not behave disorderly among you:* When Paul, Silas and Timothy worked among the Christians in Thessalonica, they did not demand support from the new converts. They worked by supporting themselves in making tents (1 Th 2:9; 4:11; see comments 3 Jn 7,8). What they lacked, the Philippian church sent to them from Macedonia (See comments Ph 4:15-17). Therefore, the orderly walk of the Christian is to work with his own hands in order to support himself. What Paul states in this context may reflect a uniqueness about the Thessalonian disciples. When the church was first initiated in Thessalonica, several socially prominent people, and thus financially wealthy people, were converted (At 17:4). Therefore, there were probably several among the disciples who had great financial means. Because Paul knew that this would attract those in the community who would seek to take advantage of the wealth of others, he, Silas and Timothy did not take support from the financially wealthy members. Instead, these evangelists

worked with their own hands in order to set an example for everyone who became a disciple that they must also work in order to support themselves. Their work with their own hands in order to support themselves also demonstrated to the unbelievers in Thessalonica that they were sincere in their preaching of the gospel. They were not seen as men who preached a message in order to receive support.

3:8 Without paying for it: Paul also left with the Thessalonians the principle of paying for what one receives. In this way, one is free of debt that otherwise would be demanded of him at a later date. **Night and day:** Paul here explains the intensity by which he, Silas and Timothy labored in Thessalonica. Their work was not only in preaching the gospel, but also in providing for their own necessities through the making of tents (See At 18:3; 1 Th 2:9). They were not full-time teachers among the people, but men with sincere hearts who had a message to proclaim. The fact that they were not full-time teachers added to the receptivity of their message, for people did not view them as hireling preachers.

3:9 Follow us: The evangelist does have the right to receive support from the church (See comments 1 Co 9:4,6-14). However, in the case of preaching to unbelievers, Paul did not ask for money because he did not want to be accused of preaching for hire (See comments 3 Jn 7). When he was traveling as an evangelist, he accepted the support of disciples who supported evangelists. However, when he stayed at the same place over a period of time, he supported himself by making tents (At 20:34,35). In this context, he wanted to set an example for the Thessalonians that they should work with their hands in order to support themselves.

3:10 We commanded: The principle which is expressed in this verse is the commandment of the Lord (1 Th 4:11). The Lord commanded such because of those who would take advantage of the benevolent attitude of the sheep of God. What Paul wants us to understand is that Christianity is not just a doctrinal belief, but a behavioral principle of life. In the principle of this verse, it is a behavioral principle of life that the Christian must work. If he

can work when work is available, but will not, then the church is under no obligation to give him food. It is the responsibility of the community of disciples to teach every disciple how to be responsible in carrying out one's life on earth. The disfellowship of the lazy disciple is for the purpose of guarding the church from perpetuating laziness by those who would take advantage of the love of others.

3:11 Walk ... disorderly: Those who were walking disorderly were the ones who were not working. They had either quit their jobs or they refused to get jobs. As a result, they had become busybodies among the brethren (1 Tm 5:13; 1 Pt 4:15). This is one of the problems with those who have stopped their work. There were those who were going about from house to house and speaking those things that they should not.

3:12 We command: It is a commandment of God that one work for his own food (See Ep 4:28; 1 Th 4:11,12). Those who can work when work is available, but will not work, are lazy. They should be disfellowshipped from the community of disciples if they are seeking to live off the benevolence of others (vs 6). Paul's intention in writing these words is to restore the idle disciples to social profitability. In order to do so, he was stern in delivering this commandment of the Lord. The church is not an opportunity for the lazy to find sustenance.

3:13 Do not grow weary: Disciples must work (See comments Gl 6:9,10). They are created in Christ for good works (Rm 7:21; Ep 2:10). Because of what God has done for them, they do for others (1 Jn 4:19). However, in doing that which is good, there is weariness (2 Co 4:1). Because Paul gave the exhortation not to grow weary in doing good, we must assume that there is a great temptation among disciples to stop doing good works. When we cease doing good works, we become an introverted social club that is of no benefit to the community in which we live.

3:14 Note that man: Paul now takes us out of the context of disfellowshipping the idle disciple to identifying anyone who would live contrary to the inspired instructions of his letter. By making this statement, therefore,

he has bound the instructions of this letter on the church as the commandment of God. Those who would not conform in their behavior to the instructions of this letter, therefore, are to be disfellowshipped from the family of believers (See comments Mt 18:15-17; 1 Co 5:9,11). **That he may be ashamed:** The purpose for the disfellowship is to shame the person who is rebellious. The disfellowship is the last option of the church to cause one to repent of his sin. Therefore, the discipline of the erring brother should not be carried out in a harsh manner. It should be carried out with a spirit of love that is firm in order that the erring brother may realize the seriousness of his rebellion (Compare Gl 6:1). The more love that is exercised in the discipline, the more the disfellowshipped disciple realizes what he is losing. Being a member of the body of Christ, therefore, means that one is in a loving relationship with those who work to support themselves and help others. Becoming a Christian is not joining a group of those who simply adhere to a code of beliefs, but those who are zealous to do good works.

3:15 Not ... as an enemy: Christians deal with an erring brother in a different manner than they deal with someone who is not a Christian. In the disfellowship of an erring brother, the church must keep in mind that the one who is disfellowshipped is still a brother. However, he is a brother who is to be admonished in order that he repent. After the action of disfellowship, association with him is for the purpose of helping him to realize the seriousness of his sin and to encourage him to repent. Therefore, faithful Christians should not associate with him in a manner that gives the impression that nothing is wrong in his relationship with the Lord and His body. He must be reminded that he is sinning, and thus, he must repent. The church's disfellowship must make the erring brother realize that he has lost his brotherhood with the disciples. In order for one to sense the feeling of losing brotherhood through disfellowship, the members of the church must maintain a close fellowship with one another. Christian fellowship among the disciples must be so strong that when one is dismissed he or she will feel the loss of a great fellowship of friends. There is lit-

the effectiveness in dismissing an erring brother who has grown cold in personal relationships among disciples. When the function of members with one another digresses to a system of spectator assemblies and ceremonial performances, then there is little to lose when one is disfellowshipped. The family relationship among disciples must be so strong that disfellowship brings great loss in one's personal relationships with others. Because the early disciples assembled in small groups in homes wherein strong relationships were built, disfellowship from such fellowships was a sad occasion for everyone involved. Being disfellowshipped from such a bonded community of believers was a traumatic experience for any individual to experience. However, if one was not dismissed from such intimate groups of disciples, the influence of sin by one member would greatly affected everyone in the group. The dismissal of the sinning individual, therefore, was necessary for the spiritual protection of the entire group as a whole.

PERSONAL BENEDICTION

3:16 *Lord of peace:* The peace of mind the world offers is only shallow and temporary. Worldly peace cannot give us peace of mind concerning eternal matters. Nothing of this world can satisfy our anxiety concerning the final judgment and eternity after the last day. Only God can reassure us concerning those things that are beyond this world. Jesus is thus the Lord of peace because all things are now under His control (Mt 28:18; Hb 11:3). ***The Lord be with you:*** In times of trial and persecution, one often comes to the conclusion that the Lord is far away. However, since in Him we live, move and have our being, then there is no way for us to be far removed from His presence (At 17:28). Since we cannot escape the presence of the Lord, then we should not conclude that the Lord is ever far away. Understanding the omnipresence of the Lord, therefore, brings peace of mind in times of trials and hardships (Jn 14:27; Rm 15:33; Ph 4:9; see Mt 28:20).

3:17,18 *My own hand:* This was Paul's authentication of this letter (1 Co 16:21). He wanted the Thessalonians

to know that he as a Christ-sent apostle had written with inspirational authority this letter by which they must direct their lives. Grace: As was common in Paul's benedictions, he reminded his readers that it was the grace of God that was manifested through Jesus. This grace should always be on our minds as the motivating energy by which we remain thankful to God (Rm 16:20,24; 1 Th 5:28). It is grace that is the motivation to love others, for it is because of God's grace that we live in thanksgiving to God (See 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15). We thus love because He manifested His love toward us through the grace of the cross (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:19).

Commentary by Roger E. Dickson
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ABREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Ci**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pi**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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