

PROBLEMS IN THESSALONICA

Customers of a bank in Warwick, Rhode Island were recently duped. An official-looking sign, in the foyer of the bank, instructed depositors to put their money in a newly installed drop-box. The sign indicated that the regular night deposit was out of order. During the long Labor Day weekend that followed, customer after customer dropped their money in what proved to be a bogus box.

Tuesday morning just before the bank opened, the crooks removed the box, and made off with thousands of dollars. The police captain commented, "This was a well thought-out and professional crime. Everybody fell for it.

They were duped."

Likewise, the Thessalonians were duped by a well thought-out crime, a carefully constructed scheme - a *doctrinal deception*. Spiritual crooks had stolen their hope. A letter had been written to the Thessalonians in Paul's name. It stated that the Lord Jesus had already returned for His Church, and the Thessalonians had been left behind. The believers were in a panic. They were certainly perplexed.

Paul writes 2 Thessalonians to refute this deception, and straighten out their confusion. He wants to restore to the Thessalonians *their God-given hope!*

Devotion Box - Overcoming Persecution

In verse 4 Paul encourages the Thessalonians, "we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure..." Paul was proud of their faith under fire. Peterson paraphrases verse 4, "We're so proud of you; you're so steady and determined in your faith despite all the hard times that have come down on you."

Remember, the Thessalonians were wartime babies - they were born in the midst of persecution. Acts 17 recounts how the leaders in Thessalonica were arrested, and how Paul and Silas had been run out of town. Yet through it all, they remained faithful to the Lord. The Thessalonians were overcomers.

So is Brother Samsul. Samsul, along with Hussain Lasker (both Gospel For Asia missionaries), were sharing the Gospel in the Indian village of Nagaland. The two men were attacked by a

group of Muslims. Hussain was murdered. Samsul was stabbed six times and left for dead. But after just a month in the hospital, Samsul returned to the village where he had been brutalized.

Brother Samsul told a reporter, "As a Muslim convert, it is my heart's desire that my own people be won to Christ." After returning to his village, Samsul led 11 people to Jesus, and baptized them into the church. He says, "Praise the Lord! Just as in history, the blood of the martyrs has become the seeds of the church."

Guys, if believers in other parts of the world can endure physical attacks, and wrongful imprisonment, and cruel torture, yet remain "steady and determined in their faith", then you and I can endure a little office alienation or social ridicule. We can stand tall, even if we're made the butt of a joke. Let's also be overcomers!

GOD'S REASON TO THE WICKED

Paul makes an astounding comment in 1:5. He calls the Thessalonians "*manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God...*"

Paul informs these baby Christians, just a few months old in the Lord - that when the end time judgments come... when Jesus fights the Antichrist and his armies of the world at the Battle of Armageddon...when Messiah crushes

the serpent's head...when Satan's allies are annihilated and obliterated...God will point to the Thessalonians - and to believers in Jesus throughout all the ages - and say to this wicked world, "There! I did this to you, because of what you did to my kids."

Nothing angers our Father God more than how the world mistreats His kids.

Devotion Box - Directing Our Hearts Into The Love Of God

Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3:5, "Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ." This is a tremendous verse. Think it through... There's no greater truth known to man than, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." But so often I wander from that truth. The love of God feels distant, and remote. My prayer needs to be, "Lord, direct my heart back into Your love. Keep bringing me back over and over for a fresh taste of Your love for me."

When my love for God grows cold it's because I've lost touch with His love for me. The more I'm directed into the *love of God*, the more my *love for God* grows.

STRENGTHENING GOD'S CASE

Paul goes on to say in verses 5-7, "that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels...". Let's imagine that my son goes out for the high school baseball team. He's by far one of the better players, but because of some politics another kid gets more playing time. I feel he's been done an injustice, and I agree to talk to the coach.

I plan to deal with the situation following the next game - and I'm ready to do just that - but that particular game turns out to be the worse game of my son's career. He gets to play and strikes out every at-bat. He makes a dozen errors.

Now, I gave my word that I would deal with the situation, so I'm still going to talk to the coach, but my son's poor performance has weakened my argument.

This is what you do to God if you don't live your life worthy of the Kingdom. *If you retaliate when persecuted - if you grow bitter and sour - if you don't respond in grace and love - God still judges the world, but you weakened His argument.*

The wicked world can point to the Christians and accuse God... "Hey, why are you judging us when your own kids never lived any better than we did?"

At the second coming of Jesus *justice will be restored, sin repaid, the righteous relieved.* When the smoke clears, and Jesus is the only one left standing on the battlefield a sigh of relief will ascend from the saints. Evil will have finally been punished - but don't give the evildoers a reason to accuse God of unfairness by pointing out that we committed the same sins for which they were judged.

Our lives should strengthen - not undermine - God's case against wickedness.

THE MAIN EVENT

I'm sure you know that God has scheduled a main event - Jesus is going to slug it out with Satan. Today, there's sparring going on, but the day will come when the devil will get decked. Jesus will return to earth - the Antichrist will hit the canvas - the wicked will get knocked out - and Satan will throw in the towel.

The second coming of Jesus is described in 1:8. The Lord comes "in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Notice why people are judged? It boils down to their attitude toward Jesus - whether they obey or reject the Gospel.

Today Jesus is mocked and ridiculed - and His fol-

lowers are treated with equal disdain - but verse 9 tells us that on Judgment Day, Jesus will be admired by the whole world... And you and I, the Church, will then be unveiled as His greatest work - His masterpiece. They'll glorify Jesus in us. *How the tables will be turned!*

The fiery trials the Thessalonians had to endure will be fought with fire. They have shared in Jesus' rejection - in the final day, they'll share in his glory. Perhaps the battle is raging around you today. You too are suffering because you stand for Jesus. Take heart! Your team will win in the end.

Be bold. Be brave. Believe!

THE FALLING AWAY

First, "the falling away". The Greek word actually means "*departure*" - it's interpreted by most Bible scholars as a departure from the faith. An apostasy will invade Christianity. Mainline churches will abandon the faith, scoff at the inerrancy of Scripture, and embrace a new age, eclectic, tolerant gospel that accommodates all other religious persuasions. If we're not witnessing the beginning stages of this apostasy, we're close.

But Greek scholar, Kenneth Wuest, has another interesting theory about this expression, "the falling away". He points out that the Greek word can also be a reference to the *departure of the Church* - or the rapture. This would support the idea that "*the day of the Lord*" doesn't begin until the church is snatched away.

THE MAN OF SIN

Second, "the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition." The final 7 years of Great Tribulation spoken of in Daniel 9 begins when a world leader - "the man of sin" or "Antichrist" makes a covenant - or treaty - with the nation Israel.

If you piece passages together: The Antichrist will lead a confederacy of 10 European nations. From Europe he'll expand his power and rule the world. At the midpoint of the final 7 years of Great Tribulation he'll violate his agreement with Israel, and desecrate the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

We're told in verse 4 he "opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." The Antichrist, or man of sin, will turn on the apostate religion that catapults him to power, and set himself up as God.

WHAT HAPPENED TO HOPE ?

In 2 Thessalonians Paul commends the church for their *faith*, and their *love* - but what about their *hope*? Remember, in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul spoke of their "work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope". Their faith and love are still intact, but between the writing of these two letters, apparently something had happened to their hope. It seems their hope has been stolen - ripped off.

Remember at the close of the Atlanta Olympics, IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch, congratulated the city for putting on a "most exceptional" summer games. His comment sent the Atlanta organizers into an uproar. And why?

Traditionally the Olympic boss calls each succeeding Olympics "the best ever" Olympics - but the Atlanta games were just a "most exceptional" Olympics. It was not *what he said*, but *what he didn't say* that snubbed the city of Atlanta.

Sometimes it's not what's said that should concern us, but what's not said... and conspicuously absent from Paul's affirmation of the Thessalonians is the mention of their hope! What happened to hope? We'll find out in chapter two.

Chapter 2 opens, "Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him..." This was this subject Paul wrote about in 1 Thessalonians 4 - the rapture of the Church. One day soon Jesus will come in the clouds and snatch away His church. In a twinkling, our *earthly bodies* will be transformed into *eternal bodies*. We'll be gathered to Jesus in the air.

Paul had not left the Thessalonians *up in the air* about the rapture. Their confusion came from elsewhere. False information had been disseminated.

And Paul confronts it in verse 2, "we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come." "*The day of Christ*" is a synonym for "*the day of the Lord*". In fact, the NIV, the NAS, and the other newer translations, say "the day of the Lord".

Here's what happened to the Thessalonians' hope.

Someone told them that they had missed the rapture, and the day of the Lord, or God's judgments on the earth, had already begun. With the fierce persecutions they were experiencing, it would've been easy to draw such a conclusion.

Remember, today is the day of man. For the most part, mankind is having his say on planet earth. But one day soon God will crash the party. He'll intervene in the affairs of men and have His say! Daniel 9 speaks of a final 7 year period that will end man's domination of planet earth. God will rain

down His wrath on the wicked and in the process, purify Israel - and usher in the Kingdom of God.

That entire period of history, yet future - starting with the rapture and culminating with the Kingdom age - is called in Scripture "the day of the Lord".

What scared the Thessalonians was the possibility that they'd missed the rapture and had been tossed into this period of Great Tribulation. In fact, they even received a letter, supposedly from Paul - that confirmed their fears. Paul assures them the letter was a forgery. The Thessalonians had been duped.

Remember, there are two types of tribulation spoken of in Scripture. One is the tribulation the world dishes out upon the church. The other, the Great Tribulation, is the tribulation God brings on the world after His church has been airlifted out.

Jesus told us we'd have to endure the tribulation the world brings upon the church, but not the tribulation God pours out upon the world. 1 Thessalonians 5:9 promises, "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus." 1:10 adds, "even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

Tragically, the persecution the Thessalonians experienced was so intense they mistook it for the Great Tribulation - and were afraid they'd missed the rapture.

Paul says in verse 3, "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed..."

People today get confused with this verse by interpreting the phrase "that Day" as the rapture. It's bigger than the rapture. "That Day" is "the day of Christ" or "*the day of the Lord*" which includes all end time events - beginning with the rapture, but including the Second Coming, and ending with the new heaven and earth.

Here's the logic Paul uses in verse 3... If events unfold A then B then C - and you don't see B and C, you know A hasn't happened. In other words, if you were in the Great Tribulation, certain prophesied events would've already occurred. It's as if I were giving directions to Calvary Chapel from Stone Mountain. I'd probably end by saying, "And if you wind up in Snellville, you've gone too far."

In essence this is what Paul says - you know you haven't missed the rapture if you haven't seen what comes afterwards - the falling away and the man of sin.

HE WHO NOW RESTRAINS

Admittedly, there's the debate over the identity of "He who now restrains" - but I believe the restrainer is *the Holy Spirit within the Church*. Not the Holy Spirit per se - there are passages that indicate the Spirit will be active after the rapture and during the Tribulation - but the Spirit in the Church.

We look around the world today - at the blasphemy and immorality - the rise of the occult - the legitimizing of paganism - the prevalence of secularism - and we realize the situation is bad... But this world ain't seen nothing yet!

Today, the Spirit's testimony through the Church is all that's holding back the rising tide of evil. On the job, in the neighborhood, at school, among your family - whether you're conscious of it or not - it's your belief in God and love for Jesus that's keeping the devil and his demons at bay. Your witness is preventing evil from running rampant. But when the rapture occurs, and the Church vacates, Satan will have a heyday - with no more resistance, all Hell will break loose.

Bible Scan - 2 Thessalonians 1-3

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - Wednesday, October 2nd 7:30 PM—Men's Huddle...Friday/Saturday, October 11-12, Men's Conference at CC Heartland—register at the Info Counter...October 25/26, "Hats off to the Virtuous Woman" - Ladies' Conference—registration starts October 6
Next Bible Scan - October 6, 2002 - 1 Timothy 1-6

"But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one."
- 2 Thessalonians 3:3

Bible Scan
Memory Verse

THE BRIGHTNESS OF HIS COMING

1 Thessalonians 2:8 says when the Church is gone the Anti-christ takes over. And he is the one, according to 2:8, "whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming." You've heard of breath that could kill - that's Jesus! He'll blow on the old blow-hard, and vaporize the evil Antichrist. He's melted in the brightness of the Lord.

In 1588, the British defeated the Spanish Armada, and Admiral Drake asked Queen Elizabeth if she'd come to pass out medals to his admirals. But beforehand Drake commanded his admirals, "On account of the dazzling loveliness of her Majesty, all men, upon receiving their prizes, should shield their eyes with their right hand..." Thus was born the military salute.

Paul is telling us beforehand that the only protection from the searing heat of the glory of Jesus is a salute. Unless you bow and pledge allegiance to Him now - one day you'll be destroyed by His glory and the brightness of His coming.

THE STRONG DELUSION

Because the world rejected the truth of the Gospel 2:11 says, "For this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie."

This is not just a lie, but "the lie" - a "strong delusion". Perhaps it's the first lie - the lie that ended our Eden. Eve believed the lie that she could be like God!

Self-deification is the theme for eastern mysticism and new age philosophy. It's the belief that the god-force dwells within each of us. "Use the force, Luke."

It's the idea that you have the power to shape your own reality - be your own god. Today, this kind of self-worship dominates pop culture. It could well be the "strong delusion" - "the lie" - that unites the world in the worship of the beast. But one day God will condemn those who have bought into the devil's deception.

Devotion Box - The Lord Is Faithful

2 Thessalonians 3:3, "the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one." What a promise!

When I was in high school, Forsyth County had a reputation of being a bigoted, prejudiced place. I'll never forget one year we were scheduled to go to Forsyth to play a football game, and our star running back, who happened to be African-American, started to get cold feet. He wasn't sure he wanted to make the trip.

The coach heard about it, and called Keith into his office... Coach Johnson said confidently, "Keith, don't you worry. If anybody tries to lay a hand on you they're going to have to go through me first." But then the coach paused, and added, "But Keith, if they get through me, you're on your own."

Paul boldly assures us, "the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one." And unlike my coach, no one gets through Jesus!

Devotion Box - No Loaves For The Loafers

Apparently, due to their emphasis on the end times there were Thessalonian believers who decided to sit out life - stay on the sidelines - wait on the rapture. *Why go to work today, if we're going to heaven tomorrow?*

The problem is that Jesus told us no one knows the day or the hour of His return. In fact, He said in Luke 19:13, "occupy till I come." In other words, root in, be faithful, fulfill the calling God has placed upon your life.

Because there were believers who had quit their jobs, they were forced to live off other people in the fellowship. Paul says plainly in verse 10, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." Guys, if a person isn't willing to work - he shouldn't eat! *No loaves for loafers*

Obviously, some people are unable to work because of injury or illness or lay-offs. Other people work, but mismanage their money and wind up in need. In both cases we need to help the needy. But if a person can work, and doesn't, then we do him a disservice and we disobey the Lord - when we feed him - and in doing so feed an irresponsible lifestyle. But they'll go hungry? The Bible says, let 'em go!

We're called on by God to bear with one

another - but the one sin for which there is zero-tolerance is laziness. Moochers need to be shown the door.

There's actually a guy in New York who enjoys fine foods, but doesn't like to work. Thirty-one times he's entered a restaurant, eaten top-notch cuisine - then shrugged his shoulders upon receiving the check, and waited for the NYPD to haul him off. The police say he actually looks forward to jail-time. He gets three square meals a day, and a warm, dry place to sleep. Over the last five years taxpayers have shelled out \$250,000 to feed, clothe, and house this one lazy man.

There are people who likewise refuse to work, but love to come to church. They travel from city to city, milking the body of Christ for a free meal or a couple nights' lodging. There are people who actually make a good living duping God's people.

The word "work" appears in the Bible 350 times. Prior to man's fall, God put Adam in the garden to till and tend it - *to work*. Work was not the result of our sin or the curse... it was an original component of paradise.