

THROUGH THE BIBLE

2 THESSALONIANS 1-3

Several years ago, customers of a bank in Warwick, Rhode Island were duped. An official-looking sign, in front of the bank, instructed depositors to put their money in a newly installed drop-box. The sign indicated the regular night deposit was out of order.

During a long Labor Day weekend, customers dropped money in what proved to be a bogus night deposit. Early Monday, before the bank opened, crooks removed the box, and made off with all the loot.

Warwick police captain, Joe Tavares, made the comment, “This was obviously a well thought-out crime. Everybody fell for it. They were duped.”

Likewise, the Thessalonians were duped by a well thought-out 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 Jesus had already returned for His Church, and the believers in Thessalonica had been left behind.

The Thessalonians were panicked - perplexed.

Paul wrote this second letter to refute this blatant deception, and straighten out their confusion. He wanted to restore hope to the church in Thessalonica!

Paul begins in verse 1, “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting...” I’ve heard it said, “A real friend warms you with his presence, trusts you with his secrets, and remembers you in his prayers.” If that’s the case, then there’s never a better friend than the Apostle Paul.

In all of Paul’s letters he prays for his readers.

Remember in 1 Thessalonians 3:12 Paul prayed specifically for the Thessalonians, “may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another...”

Here he thanks God for answering his previous prayer... “because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other...” The Thessalonians were abounding in love.

Verse 4, “so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure...”

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 was run out of town.

Yet through it all the Thessalonians had been faithful to the Lord. These people were overcomers.

So is Brother Samsul. In the summer of 1997, 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 muslim fanatics. Hussain was murdered.

Samsul was stabbed six times and left for dead.

Yet after just one month in the hospital, Samsul recovered from his wounds, and returned to the same village where he'd been brutalized. Brother Samsul explained to 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 eleven people to Christ, and baptized them into the church. He said of the persecution, "Just as in history, the blood of the martyrs has become the seeds of the church."

If believers in other parts of the world can endure beatings, and imprisonment, and torture, yet remain "steady and determined in their faith" then you and I can endure a little office alienation or social ridicule.

We should still stand tall, even when made the butt of a joke. Let's develop a strong, overcoming faith.

Now Paul has commended the Thessalonians for their *faith* and their *love* - but what about their *hope*?

Recall in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul had spoken of the their "work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope." Here, their faith and love are still intact, but between the writing of these two letters something has happen to their hope. Their hope has been stolen.

As an Atlanta resident, I'll never forget the Olympic snub the city received at the close of the 1996 games.

Traditionally the IOC President congratulates the host city for putting on “the best ever games.” But that year all he mustered was “a most exceptional games.”

Myself, along with millions of Atlantans, thought, “*We’ve been inconvenienced with construction and traffic for weeks, and all we get is ‘most exceptional.’*”

It’s not *what was said*, but *what wasn’t said* that bothered us - as is the case here in 2 Thessalonians. Paul commends them for their love and faith, but what happened to their hope? We’ll find out in Chapter 2...

But first, Paul continues to comfort this persecuted church – *and he does it in a surprising way* - he wows them with a description of Jesus’ return to planet Earth.

This is interesting... Paul encourages and comforts a persecuted church with a picture of future judgment...

Notice, in verse 5 Paul refers to the faithful church in Thessalonica as “manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God...” What a heavy statement to make!

Paul informs these believers, just a few months old in the Lord, that when Jesus returns at the Battle of Armageddon to crush Satan and annihilated the armies of man – God will point to the Thessalonians, and to all believers in all ages, and say to a hostile world, “There! I did this to you, because of what you did to my kids.”

Nothing angers God more than how the world mistreats His kids. All persecution will be punished.

And Paul insures the Thessalonians, “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...” This evil world thinks it can oppose Christ, and trash His Church, and there be no penalties... not so!

Jesus commands us “to turn the other cheek.” It’s not His time or our place to execute retribution.

But at the end of the age, Jesus will return - not to turn the other cheek - but to bust the world in its chops. He’ll repay the world’s tribulation with Great Tribulation.

In the end, God will trouble the wicked, “and... give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels...”

Imagine your son goes out for the baseball team. He’s by far one of the better players, but because of Little League politics another kid starts in his place.

An injustice has been done, and as a parent you feel it’s your obligation to talk to the coach. You plan to do so after the next game. But in that game your son gets to play, and he’s terrible. It’s his worst game ever. He strikes out every at-bat, and makes a couple of errors.

Now you said you were going to talk to the coach about your son not starting - and it might still be an injustice - but your son’s poor performance has weakened your argument. What are you going to say?

And this is why the faith of the Thessalonians is so strategic. Their endurance in the face of persecution is the “*evidence of the righteous judgment of God.*”

They need to live a life “*worthy of the kingdom...*”

For if they grow bitter, and repay evil with evil, and become vindictive and hateful - and don't respond to the persecution with grace and love - then their persecutors can one day answer God, *“Why are you judging us, when Your own people were no different?”*

Stoop to their level and we weaken God's argument.

At Jesus' second coming *justice will be restored - sin will be repaid - and the righteous will be relieved...*

When the smoke clears on the battlefield, and Jesus is the only one left standing - a sigh of relief will ascend from the saints – wickedness has finally been punished, and righteousness will be rewarded.

But if God is going to judge the wicked in the Lord's day, we need to avoid those same sins in our day.

Verse 8 tells us, Jesus will come *“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, how men are judged in the last days?*

It all boils down to the Gospel. What they did with Jesus? Did they obey or reject the Gospel of Christ?

People who reject the Gospel, *“shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power...”* Here's the essence of Hell - it's eternal separation from the Lord.

You can't live a life defiant of Jesus - or on the run from Jesus - then expect to live with Him for all eternity.

Since you didn't like Him, and resisted His influence, eternity is designed to honor your choice forever. It's *“everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.”*

For *“when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.”* Jesus is returning to be glorified where He was crucified. He'll rule where He was rejected.

Even today, Jesus is mocked and ridiculed – and His followers are treated with equal disdain. But on Judgment Day Jesus will be admired by the world.

Then, you and I, the Church, will be unveiled as His greatest work - *His masterpiece*. Irony of ironies, the world will glorify Jesus in us. How the tables will turn!

Thus, Paul intercedes for the Thessalonians, verse 11, *“Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

What a high calling we've been given... *that Christ will one day be glorified in us for all the world to see!*

Let's begin to live out that calling today.

Chapter 2, *“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him...”* This was Paul's subject in 1 Thessalonians 4. He

describes **the rapture of the Church**. One day, Jesus will come in the clouds and snatch up His Bride.

In the twinkling of an eye, these *earthly bodies* will be transformed into *eternal bodies* - bods fit for God.

And we'll be gathered to each other and to Jesus.

Paul didn't leave the Thessalonians *up in the air* about the rapture. He carefully explained *what's up* with this important event. Yet, confusion had occurred.

False information had been disseminated. And in verse 2, Paul confronts it... "**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.**" Actually, "*The day of Christ*" here is a synonym for "*the day of the Lord.*" In fact the NAS, and the newer translations have "**the day of the Lord.**"

Now, what happened to the Thessalonians' hope?

From Paul's statement in verse 2 we can infer that someone told them they had missed the rapture. "**The day of the Lord,**" or God's future judgment, had begun.

Put yourself in Thessalonian shoes... with the fierce persecution they were under they might've concluded that they were experiencing the Great Tribulation.

Remember, today is "**the day of man.**" For the most part, mankind is having his say and getting his way.

But God is about to spoil the party.

God will intervene in the affairs of men and have His say! Daniel 9 speaks of a final seven year period that will end mankind's domination of planet earth.

God will rein down His wrath on the wicked world, purify Israel, and usher in the Kingdom of God. And that period, yet future – starting at the rapture and culminating with the Kingdom - is “the day of the Lord.”

What scared the Thessalonians was the possibility that they’d missed the opening act - the rapture - and had been tossed into this period of Great Tribulation.

In fact, they had even received a letter, supposedly from Paul, that had confirmed their fears. Paul assures them the letter was a forgery. They’d been duped.

Several years ago a man from Clearwater, Florida, was getting a kick out of dialing 9-1-1. Fourteen times in the last three years he called in a false emergency.

Today, the man in the slammer, but when arrested he told the police he enjoyed watching fire trucks and flashing lights. He gets his jollies from creating a panic.

There must’ve been a similar fellow in the church at Thessalonica. He enjoyed setting off false alarms. The church was panicked, but they had no reason to be...

Recall the two types of tribulation spoken of in Scripture. Jesus promised His Church that “in this world you will have tribulation.” There is a tribulation the world brings upon the Church. But the tribulation that comes in *the day of the Lord* is the wrath of God poured out on an evil world. This is the Great Tribulation, and from it God will spare His Church.

As we’re promised in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus.” The rapture is our great escape!

So, verse 3, “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day...” *What day does he mean?* Not the rapture per se - but “*the Day of the Lord*” - the period of time when God will pour out His fierce judgments.

This final time period “will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed...”

Follow the logic Paul uses to clear up this confusion. If events unfold A, then B, then C - and you haven't seen A and B - then you know C hasn't happened yet.

Thus, before God pours out final judgment there'll be a *falling away* and *the man of sin is revealed*. Since the Thessalonians had seen neither, they didn't miss the rapture and weren't in the midst of Great Tribulation.

It's as if I were giving directions to CC from Athens.

“Head straight down Hwy 78 - but you're not there yet until you pass through Loganville and Snellville.”

In essence this is what Paul says – if you'd missed the rapture and you were in the midst of the Great Tribulation - then you would've already seen what comes first - “*the falling away*” and “*the man of sin.*”

He mentions two events....

First, “*the falling away*” - the Greek word means “*departure.*” It's interpreted by most Bible scholars as *a departure from the faith*. An apostasy will plague Christianity. False doctrine will lead folks astray.

Believers will no longer rightly divide God's Word. They'll move away from Scripture, and create their own eclectic religion. It'll be a religion of tolerance that

accommodates all kinds of persuasions. Surely, the Church today is barreling towards this apostasy.

This is the religion that catapults the Antichrist to power. Revelation 17 envisions it as a spiritual harlot.

Yet there's another possible interpretation of *"the falling away."* Famed Greek scholar, Kenneth Wuest, points out that the Greek word could also be a reference to *the departure of the Church* or the rapture.

In other words, Paul is saying *"the day of the Lord"* won't begin until the Church has been snatched away!

They know that they're not in the Great Tribulation because *"the falling away* (or the rapture) *comes first"*

And second, *"the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition..."* The final seven years of Great Tribulation in Daniel 9 begins when a world leader, known in Scripture as *"the man of sin"* or *"the Antichrist"* makes a covenant - or signs a treaty - with the nation Israel.

Piecing various passages together: The Antichrist will rise as the leader of a confederacy of ten European nations. He expands his power to rule the world.

At the midpoint of the Great Tribulation he'll violate his agreement with Israel, and desecrate their Temple.

We're told here in verse 4 that 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."* Apparently, this Antichrist will turn on the apostate Christianity that catapults him to power, and sets himself up as God.

And Revelation 13 explains how *the man of sin* will blackmail the world into worshipping him. To buy or sell a person will be required to take his number. It's a mark in the right hand or forehead... the number **666**.

Apparently, this *Future Fuhrer* will takeover the hardware of economic exchange. Cashless technology, digital currency, electronic transactions - may be tools by which the Antichrist extorts the world's worship.

He'll use some kind of configuration of 666.

It's interesting how many people are afraid of this number. In 1979 Ronald and Nancy Reagan moved to the Bel-Air area of Los Angeles. Their new address was 666 St. Cloud Rd. They had it changed to 668.

There were new moms who went to great extremes to keep from birthing their babies on June 6, 2006.

In fact, there's a term for the fear of the number six hundred, sixty-six, "**Hexakosioihexekontahexaphobia**."

Here's the good news. Christians don't have to be afraid of 666! We're not looking for the Antichrist, *we're looking for Jesus Christ*. Paul tells us He comes first.

Verse 5, "**Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?**" He's covering old ground here. He's straightening out their deception.

"And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 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."

Paul tells us *“the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.”* There’s *“a spirit of Antichrist”* in the world today - a hostility against Christ. You can speak about God all day long and not offend anyone, but mention the name of Jesus, and they’ll want to shut you up.

Satan has been jealous of Jesus from early on. He doesn’t just oppose Jesus, he wants to take His place.

This is why throughout history Satan has deceived men into assuming God is the bad guy, and he is the good guy – he’s the one who ought to be worshipped. This is what Paul calls, *“the mystery of lawlessness.”*

And if you think the animosity toward Jesus is bad now, just wait until *“He who now restrains is taken away.”* *And who is the Restrainer? - you might ask...*

There’s debate over His identity. But I believe *“He who now restrains...”* is *the Holy Spirit in His Church.*

Not the Holy Spirit per se, for the Spirit will continue to be around after the rapture, and during the Great Tribulation. But right now it’s the Holy Spirit in the Church that’s pushing back and keep the devil at bay.

But once the Church is raptured it’s katy-bar-the-door. Satanism, paganism, war, sexual perversion, greed, domestic abuse, random violence will all run rampant. Think it’s bad now, you ain’t seen nothing yet!

Today, the Spirit’s presence in the Church is all that’s holding back the tide of evil in the world.

On the job, in the hood, at the school, among the family – whether we realize it or not, our belief in God, our love for Jesus, our stand for the truth - is providing

resistance to the devil and keeping evil in check. But when the Church is gone the devil will have a heyday.

Verse 8, “**And then the lawless one will be revealed...**” Once the Restrainer is gone, the Antichrist has no restraint. He takes control and moves his real agenda center stage - *but he’s not in power for long...*

For he is the one “**whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.**” This is real show of power!

You’ve heard of breath that would kill – that’s Jesus! He’ll blow on the devil’s blow-hard, and the evil Antichrist will vaporized. God breathed into Adam *the breath of life*. Here Jesus breathes *the breath of death*.

A single glimmer of His glory disintegrates the Beast.

In 1588, after the British Navy defeated the Spanish Armada, Admiral Drake asked Queen Elizabeth if she would honor his troops with her presence. He wanted the Queen to pass out medals to his admirals.

She agreed, but before she arrived Drake commanded his men, “**On account of the dazzling loveliness of her Majesty, all men, upon receiving their prizes, should shield their eyes with their right hand.**”

And thus was born the military salute.

Here Paul is telling us the only protection from the searing heat of the glory of Christ is a salute. We need to bow and pledges allegiance to the Master. Either yield to His glory now, or be destroyed by it later.

Paul adds that “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders...” Satan’s power is real, and his wonders are legit. Moses turned his rod into a serpent, but Pharaoh’s magicians duplicated the feat.

The Antichrist is a *miracle man*. He perform wonders, but they’re “*lying wonders.*” God uses miracles to draw men to the truth. Satan uses them to sell lies.

Verse 10 highlights the purpose of his lies. “And with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” Satan knows he’s going down. He wants to take as many folks with him as possible.

It’s sad, but once a person rejects the truth, they’ll fall for anything. This means people alive in the Great Tribulation will be vulnerable to Satan’s deceptions.

Verse 11, “And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie...”

Notice, this is not just *a lie*, but “*the lie.*” Perhaps it’s the very first lie – the lie that upended utopia.

Eve believed the lie that she could be like God!

Today, self-deification is the foundation for eastern mysticism and new age philosophy. It’s the belief that the god-force dwells in you. “Use the force, Luke!” That you can shape your own reality - be your own god.

And self-deification is the the epitome of all sin.

It's *the spirit of Antichrist*. Realize the prefix "anti" as in "Antichrist" can mean either "against" or "in place of." Thus, the spirit of Antichrist either bucks and opposes the will of Christ - or puts itself in the place of Christ.

This kind of self-worship is becoming increasingly popular. And it could well be the strong delusion – "the lie" – that unites the world in the worship of the beast.

And God sends this lie to consolidate mankind's rebellion. He'll end the coup once and for all. Verse 12, "that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

And why would anyone want to be their own god?

It's fun. Sin is pleasurable. That's why it's tempting. Yet one day God condemns those "who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in unrighteousness."

Verse 13, "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle." It's not enough to hear once and believe. We need to hold fast and continue in your faith.

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work." The Thessalonians are reminded not only of *love* and *faith*, but their "*good hope by grace*."

Chapter 3, “Finally, brethren, pray for us...” Paul prayed earlier for the Thessalonians, now he asks them to return the favor... “That the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you...”

Jeremiah says the Word of God is like a hammer.

Hebrews tells us it's like a sharp, two-edged sword.

The psalmist says it's sweeter than the honeycomb.

Here we're told the Word of God has 4.2 speed in the 40 yard dash. It'll “run swiftly.” It tracks its prey. As Jonah discovered you can't outrun the Lord's will.

And “that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.” Men will let you down, but the Lord is faithful.

For years Forsyth county had a reputation of being a bigoted, prejudiced place. It was especially so, when I was in High School. And one year the Comets were scheduled to play a football game in Forsyth county.

Our star running back at the time was a black kid named Keith. And when Coach Johnson heard Keith was getting cold feet and was thinking about skipping the trip to Forsyth, he called Keith into his office.

He said, “Keith, don't you worry. If anybody tries to lay a hand on you they're going to have to go through me first.” Then Coach Johnson paused, and added, “But Keith, if they get through me, you're on you own.”

And this is what Paul assures us. Even if friends forsake you or let you down, “the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.”

And unlike our coach, no one gets through Jesus.

“And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.”

There’s no greater truth 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 distance.

My prayer needs to be, “Lord, direct my heart back into your love. Keep bringing me back for a taste...”

Verse 6, “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.” Issues were arising in the church that called for discipline. And when a wayward believer refuses church discipline the final remedy is to withdraw fellowship from that brother.

Remove the protection of the church family - and let the rebel taste the consequences of his or her sin.

“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.”

Paul was a pastor, and the pastor has the right to be compensated by the Church.

But Paul was willing to forego his rights, for the betterment of the Body. He was bivocational. Tent-maker by day, pastor by night, and burden to no one.

He continues, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” There’s a guy in New York who enjoys fine food, but he doesn’t like to work. Thirty-one times he’s entered a restaurant, eaten top cuisine – and then shrugged his shoulders upon receiving the check, and waited for police to haul him off to jail.

The police say he actually looks forward to jail-time.

He gets three square meals and a place to sleep. Over the last five years taxpayers have shelled out \$250,000 to feed, clothe, and house this one lazy man.

You may not be able to work... You may be able, but not have a job... In those cases the church should help.

But if you just don’t want to work, then you shouldn’t be given a handout. We shouldn’t interfere with the lesson God and your hungry stomach is teaching you.

Paul is adamant... “no loafers for the loafers.”

Because of the Thessalonian’s emphasis on the coming of Christ there were believers in the church who decided to sit out life, and just wait on the rapture.

They failed to get an education - and prepare for life.

They refused to get a job, and mooched off the other believers. Paul says “stop it.” Christian benevolence should never breed another person’s irresponsibility.

If a person won’t work, don’t give food to eat.

Verse 11, “For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.” Without a job, people became idle, and stuck their nose in other people’s business.

You've heard it, "Idleness is the devil's workshop."

The Jewish rabbis use to teach, "He who doesn't teach his son a trade, teaches him to be a thief."

The ancient Romans said, "By doing nothing, men learn to do evil." Good honest work keeps a person *out of trouble*, and keeps their stomach *from the rumble*.

Verse 12, "Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good." *Making a living and doing good* are the two pursuits that should occupy a Christian's life.

Verse 14, "And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

Note the balance in Paul's discipline. If a brother persistently disobeys, don't pretend it's all cool – don't be buddy-buddy – don't hang out like nothing's wrong!

Yet don't abandon him completely either.

He's your brother in Christ. Sit him down and tell him what concerns you. Make it an issue - and keep it an issue - until he's willing to resolve the issue.

"Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.

The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write." The Thessalonians had been duped once. They received a letter supposedly

from Paul, but it wasn't. He tells them how to be sure a letter is from him... *Check the signature.*

Paul dictated his letters, but at the end of each one he took the quill in hand and signed it personally.

His his signature was the stamp of authenticity.

Verse 18 closes the book of II Thessalonians, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”