

Study 8: 2nd Thessalonians Chapter 1

Introduction

The second letter, like the first was written to a congregation that is only a few months old, and has been left (essentially) leaderless. The news from Thessalonica was good, and whilst Paul had answered some of their questions, there were still more to be answered.

Body of the Study

The Salutation

Words of Encouragement

The Lord's return

The punishment

Prayer for the Thessalonians

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *What are some of the ways that the Thessalonians might have grown in the Lord? What was the thing that “fed them” in this growth? How might their growth have been exhibited “on the ground” – ie – what were they doing that demonstrated and nurtured it?*
- *Read the chapter again from the view of the Thessalonians: You are new Christians, and continuing to suffer affliction. What feelings does Paul's letter bring out in you – how does it make you feel?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 2 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 8: Chapter 1

Introduction

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Body of the Study

The Salutation

As with the first letter, Paul “signs the letter” at the beginning, and writes together with Silas and Timothy. Timothy had returned from Thessalonica after delivering the first letter, and Silas had headed out with him (probably to Berea, or maybe to Philippi). Silas had also returned at the time of writing, probably coming back with Timothy.

As with the first letter, the elders and / or deacons are not addressed, which suggests that none have been appointed at this time. The first letter was to be read to all of the church (1:5:27), and the second letter is likewise addressed to the whole church.

Paul makes quite strong references to “...*the Lord Jesus Christ...*” (2:1:1; 2:1:2; 2:1:12; 2:3:18). This description emphasises the divine and messianic nature of Jesus and His relationship to God the Father (2:1:1; 2:1:2; 2:1:7; 2:1:8; 2:1:12). [The Greek word translated Lord is the word *kurios* which literally means “supremacy” and is translated as God; Lord; Master; or Sir. It emphasises Jesus’ divine nature and supremacy. Jesus is the person under consideration, and the word translated Christ is the Greek word *Christos* and means “*the Christ – the Messiah – the Anointed one*”]. This three fold description thus emphasises the divine and messianic nature of Jesus.

With such an emphasis, Paul provides and reinforces the assurance that we have in Jesus as the Son of God, and hence His ability to deliver on His promises.

Paul also emphasises “...*Grace and peace...*” (1:1:2; 1:1:12; 1:3:16; 1:3:18). This is a traditional greeting amongst the early christians, and is used by Paul elsewhere (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; Tit 1:4; Phm 1:3) and also by other New Testament writers (1Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:2; 2 Jn 1:3; Rev 1:4).

There is a hint here that that the brethren in Thessalonica are *not at peace*, and Paul discusses some of the underlying problems further in the letter.

Words of Encouragement

In the short time that the church had been established, and since many of them had become christians, they had continued to grow and show themselves as active christians. Paul (and Silas and Timothy) were grateful and thankful for their response to the gospel “...*We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing...*” (2:1:3 NIV). Their faith was growing, and their brotherly love increasing.

Paul’s view of the progress that was being made by the Thessalonians was such that everywhere he went, he would hear good things about them (1:1:8-9), and he himself would “...*boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring....*” (2:1:4 NIV). The Thessalonians were continuing to receive the persecutions that forced Paul out the city. The zealotness of the Thessalonian Jews was such that they even followed Paul, Silas, and Timothy to Berea and persecuted them there. It is therefore not at all surprising that the persecution of the christians in Thessalonica continued.

Despite the persecutions, the Thessalonians (and us!!!) can rest assured that God is a God of justice. He will not allow His saints to suffer persecution without their accusers being held to account for their actions “...it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you...” (2:1:6 NKJV). The Thessalonians were suffering because of their faith. The very fact of their persecution on this basis was evidence of the true relationship that they had with God “...as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering...” (2:1:5 NIV). Whilst they were suffering now, they can rest assured that God knows the true story. They need not worry about their salvation, and the tribulations that they were experiencing were evidence that they were standing for God.

The Lord's return

Continuing the thought of retribution towards those who persecute Christians, Paul reminds them of the fact that when Jesus returns, the saints will find rest and the persecutors troubles – “...you who are troubled rest with us...” (2:1:7 NKJV). Paul now gives an outline of the event:

- The Lord Jesus will be revealed (which implies that He is now hidden)
- He will come *from* heaven (not going *to* heaven)
- He will come with His mighty angels
- It will be with flaming fire
- Taking vengeance
 - On those who do not know God
 - And on those (who know God, but) do not obey the gospel.

The punishment

Those described above – those who do not know God, and those who know Him but do not obey the gospel – face punishment. The punishment will be everlasting. There will be no end to it, and those who receive it will not be able to endure it for a while and then find relief. The punishment will also be “...everlasting ... (removal) ... from the presence of the Lord...” (2:1:9 NKJV). God is light, and provides life (Jn 1:4 - 5). Without God, we have nothing. The punishment will be to be removed from the presence of the Lord “...and from the glory of His power...”

Paul is quite clear about when these things are going to happen. [Remember to keep this in context – he is providing assurance here for the Thessalonians who are suffering persecution, and assuring them that God is a God of justice, and will ensure that the persecutors will be punished] “...when He comes, in that Day...” (2:1:10 NKJV). The day of justice is coming, and it will come on the day that the Lord returns.

Some other things will also happen on that day. It will be the day that the Lord comes “...to be glorified in His saints...” (2:1:10). The day when the saints glorify the Lord will be the same day that the unrighteous receive their reward of affliction. It is true in a sense, that we glorify the Lord in everything that we do in our lives, however this is clearly not the sense that Paul is discussing here. He has in mind the time when *every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess Jesus as Lord* (Php 2:10-11). This is the day when the Lord will “...be admired among all those who believe...” (2:1:10). Like the former expression, of being glorified in His saints, the saints will see Him, and be able to “... marvelled at among all those who have believed...” (2:1:10 NIV).

The assurance is clear. The saints will be on Jesus' side “...because you believed our testimony to you...” (2:1:11 NIV). If we believe what Jesus (and the apostle's teaching) said, then we will do what He says (Jn 14:15; Lk 6:46). There is a stark contrast between those who will be punished, and those who will rejoice. The choice is up to us. Just believing what Jesus said is not enough – we also need to obey Him and do what He says. This is putting our faith into action.

Prayer for the Thessalonians

Paul has provided assurance to the Thessalonians about their state with the Lord, and continually prays that it might continue. This is not the prayer, but rather a statement about the prayers that Paul, Silas, and Timothy were making on behalf of the Thessalonians. There is purpose in their prayer, and it is “...*that our God would count you worthy...*” (2:1:11 NKJV). Whilst Paul has already given them this assurance, it is quite possible that they could fall away and lose their salvation. They need to *continue in the faith* as they have already been doing.

Being found worthy, they will also “...*fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness...*” (2:1:11 NKJV). The NIV makes this passage of reassurance much clearer “...*that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith...*”. The faithfulness of the Thessalonians was without question, and they were acting just as God would have them to do. Their reward – both in this life and in that to come – was in the Lord’s hands.

As they lived a life of service and sacrifice, they glorified the Lord. “...*We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. ...*” (2:1:12 NIV). If He is to be glorified in them at His return, then it can only happen if He is glorified by them in their present way of life.