

2 Thessalonians 1

Intro:

--This letter was written by Paul while still in Corinth. The three men mentioned in greeting (**1:1**) are no longer recorded serving together after Paul leaves the city.

--Which would place this epistle just a few months after the first. Most likely in response to Timothy returning with news from the reception of **1 Thessalonians**.

--There are three main reasons Paul writes—each addressed in successive chapters and punctuated by a prayer: **1:11-12; 2:16-17; 3:5+16**.

1) In the first chapter, Paul encourages the believers as they faithfully endure persecution.

2) In the second chapter, Paul deals with a specific doctrinal confusion. The church was apparently under the impression they were living in the day of the Lord.

3) In chapter three, Paul finishes with behavioral exhortations respecting Christian life and doctrine.

Verses 1-2:

--This is a typical greeting. Paul again identifies himself, Silas, and Timothy as those sending this epistle—though Paul is clearly the author.

--The church was familiar with each of these men because each had ministered there for at least some period.

--Paul always wants to remind his brothers and sisters in Christ of the grace and peace they have from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 3-4:

--**(3) We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting.** . . . The Greek word for **bound** could be translated *ought* and expresses a debt or obligation.

--His thanksgiving to God was both due (in terms of answered prayers) and a fitting or proper response.

--**because your faith grows exceedingly.** . . . Paul is rightly thankful to God for His work in them despite their places of immaturity (**2:1-2; 3:6-18**).

--The Greek for **grows exceedingly** is a compound form of the word used only here in the NT (Though Paul uses similar expressions like this about 10 times in his epistles—to “super” something was definitely a Paulism).

--The idea behind the expression is super-growth, or growth that is beyond reasonable expectations. The spiritual growth in their fellowship was a true supernatural miracle.

--**and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other.** . . . They were a crowd of individually loving persons—diffusing their love to each other. There was evident brotherly love in their gatherings and fellowship.

--Again, the fellowship was not perfect, but these spiritual realities were true. Paul was not ignoring the immature or problem makers—they were in the background. *Too often we put the smaller issues before the supernatural spiritual realities that we owe a debt of thanksgiving to God for!*

--This begs the question: *Are our personal faith and love growing in our environment?*

--It is notable that the biblical virtue of hope is not mentioned here by Paul as it was in **1 Thess. 1:3**. No doubt that is because of their confusion concerning their true biblical hope that Paul was about to address.

--**(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. . .** Paul didn't boast of many fellowships to other fellowships—but this group of believers was one of the few!

Proverbs 27:2: Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.

--He particularly boasts of their patience and faith despite **persecutions** (typically relating to hardships from other men) and **tribulations** (typically relating to various circumstances).

--Paul boasted about how they **endure**. The Greek word literally means *to hold oneself up*. We say in our day: *How are you holding up?*

--We are called to stand for Christ in this life while the wind is in our face. This world will either be all the heaven we will know (unsaved) or all the hell we will know (us!).

Verse 5:

--**which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God. . .** Paul calls the Thessalonian saints' experience of faithfully and patiently enduring persecution and tribulation **manifest evidence** or *clear indication* that God's judgment of them and their persecutors is right.

--**that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer. . .** The faithful and patient sufferings of believers have meaning. There is a *worthiness* or *moral and spiritual fitness* to them as we journey and battle toward an eternal kingdom.

Acts 5:40-41: And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Philippians 1:27-28: Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ. . . and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.

--Jesus warned His disciples about unfitness for the kingdom of God.

Luke 9:26 + 62: For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels. . But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

--Our lives should be proof of God's judgment on the wicked and our fitting character for the spiritual and eternal nature of His kingdom. Our persecutions and tribulations look different in this life—but our faithful and patient endurance should be forged with the same spiritual iron.
--Paul is seeking to encourage these afflicted believers by contrasting the destiny of the unsaved with their own. The appearance of Jesus Christ will bring separate and diverging results.

Verses 6-7a:

--since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you rest with us. . . Paul says God is going to righteously repay their trouble with trouble.

--The persecutors will end with trouble from God, but these believers will end in **rest** with Paul, Silas, and Timothy. The Greek word for **rest** was used to describe the relaxing of a taut bowstring—relief from pressure.

--Wonderfully, it is the Son of Man (not some angel that has never lived or understood human life) who has designed our rest. The King of Kings has all authority and power to see that our rest is all that it should be for the service we have paid to His cause. **Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**

Verses 7b-8:

--When is this rest? **When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire. . .** When Jesus Christ is **revealed** (*apokalypsis*) in His glory from heaven and with heaven's inhabitants. *Saul/Paul had his own little version of this on the road to Damascus!*

--The company of angels at Jesus' revelation in power is repeated throughout the Scriptures: **Mt. 13:41-42; 16:27; 25:31; Jude 15; Rev. 14:19.**

--taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . Jesus will personally punish with righteous judgment.

John 5:22: For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son.

--Who will be judged? Is this a description of two groups or two characteristics of the same group? Some commentators make Gentiles the first group and Jews the second, but I think that is totally out of context. Also, the Scriptures make it clear that the Jews will be **saved** at Jesus' second coming—not judged!

--The description is two characteristics of the same group.

--those who do not know God are those who have willfully rejected obeying the true demands of the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

--I believe Paul emphasizes obedience because before the second coming will be the most rebellious and willful rejection of the gospel, made all the worse by the circumstances of the tribulation preceding Jesus' unveiling in glory. The gospel of the tribulation demands *obedience* as a true expression of saving faith.

--Doesn't this gospel sound different from what we would currently preach?

Revelation 14:6-7: *Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”*

Verse 9:

--In this single verse, we have a summation of what the Scriptures teach about hell—or the eternal judgment of God. The reality of eternal judgment is taught most clearly by Jesus Christ Himself.

--Hell is referenced in some degree by *every* NT author: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and the author of Hebrews. Why? They were commissioned to go into all the world and teach *everything* that Jesus commanded. *We are not making up our own message like “deconstructioners” or liberal theologians!*

--Paul encapsulates the three main biblical descriptions of hell:

1) Punishment: ***These shall be punished.*** . . . punishment is the payment of a penalty.

Matthew 25:31-46: . . . *And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

--God's punishment in hell will be just. If there is no hell, then there is no need for salvation!

--So many people make light of their sin and therefore imagine that God will make light of it as well. They will be sadly mistaken! To say He is loving and gracious has nothing to do with how He views sin. *All* sin is, in fact, worse than we could possibly imagine.

--There are no little sins because there is no little God to sin against. There is no little hell for little sinners to go to!

2) Destruction: ***everlasting destruction.*** . . . the ruin of true purpose. *Think of a building.*

Matthew 7:13-14: *Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it, because narrow is the gate and difficult the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

--The destruction of hell is the final utter ruin of the very purpose of life. It is going from life to something other. *No one is partying in hell—even the devil*

--Hell is destruction—the unchanging forfeiting of all life. It means that the people there *were* a human soul in life but now are only the rubble of one.

3) Banishment: **from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.** . . the separation of creation from Creator. Eternally lost.

Matthew 7:21-23: . . . And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

*Lewis (The Weight of Glory): *"In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised."**

--All three of these descriptions are true of one **everlasting** outcome. The Bible knows nothing about the annihilation of the lost. Our end is eternal life or eternal death.

--The Greek word used here for **everlasting** (*aiionios*) is used in the Bible for: eternal life, death, heaven, God, glory, our resurrection bodies, God's power, the purpose of God, salvation, judgment, redemption, the Holy Spirit, etc.

--It is impossible to make this word conditional (to say eternal life or judgment has a possible end) without making all the other things it describes conditional. Everlasting is everlasting.

--The punishment, destruction, and banishment from the Lord Jesus Christ is everlasting.

--I think it is important we don't lose the context of this passage in the jumble of our modern thoughts on the subject of hell. What I mean by that is this: *For Paul, the punishment of hell answered their questions of God's justice. It wasn't the source of doubts or questions for the Thessalonians. It was the perspective they needed.*

--The doctrine of hell is not an enjoyable teaching for us, but it is most certainly healthy. *It helps us keep the true value and meaning of life in proper perspective.*

Verse 10:

--What a contrast of destinies we see here!

--**when He comes.** . . is *whenever He comes.* . . we don't know the day.

--**in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe.** . . Jesus will be the ultimate cause of wonder and admiration.

--Remarkably, Paul makes the point that Jesus Christ will be glorified in us. The Church perfected will reflect His glory and reveal His purposes in a way that even the angels will wonder at (**1 Peter 1:12**).

Ephesians 3:10-11: to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,

--This is the triumphant moment Paul describes as **the revealing of the sons of God (Rom. 8:19)**. This is the moment it will be made evident what being in Christ truly means!

--**because our testimony among you was believed.** . . All those who believed in life now step into the sight and glory of faith.

--My life will glorify God either way—but I would rather glorify Him in everlasting glory than everlasting punishment.

Verses 11-12:

--(11) Paul ends his encouragement to his persecuted brothers and sisters with a prayer.

--**Therefore. . . to this end, with this in view.**

--**we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling. . .** The worthiness Paul is praying for is in relation to calling and not salvation. They are not working *for worthiness* but *from worthiness*.

Ephesians 4:1: I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

--Paul desired the Thessalonians would continue to display presently the reality of the life to come. *Does our Christian practice match our Christian profession?*

--**and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power. . .** Here we find inner and outer activity. God is working in us with His good pleasure and power to produce works of goodness and faith.

--This is a recurring sentiment for Paul as he prayed for believers:

Philippians 2:13: for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

***Colossians 1:10: that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, being fruitful in every good work. . . ***

--Christianity is God's power working in and through us by the Holy Spirit.

--(12) **that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him. . .** the order is set—we glorify Him on earth *before* He glorifies us for eternity. This was the example of Jesus Christ.

John 17:4-5: I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

--It wouldn't be proper for us to be glorified before our Lord Jesus Christ. He secured our glory for us, and He should be the most glorious and first partaker.

Romans 8:18: For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

--God never promises it will all be easy. He does promise it will all be worth it. Eternally so.

**Sibbes (The Bruised Reed): "If judgment shall be brought forth to victory, then those that have been ruled by their own deceitful hearts and a spirit of error shall be brought forth to disgrace. The God that has joined grace and truth with honor has joined sin and shame together at last. All the wit and power of man will never be able to sever what God has coupled together. . . There shall be a resurrection, not only of bodies but of reputations. . . What was said of Pharaoh shall be said of all heady enemies, who rather lose their souls than their wills, that they are but raised up for Christ to get himself glory in their confusion.*

*Let us, then, take heed that we follow not the ways of those men whose ends we tremble at. . . This is the difference between a godly, wise man and a deluded worldling: that which the one now judges to be vain the other shall hereafter feel to be so when it is too late."**