

Studies in the Book of 2 Thessalonians Hope for a Hopeless World

Introduction

The church was going through persecution, and some of the believers thought they were already in the Day of the Lord, that time of tribulation in which the whole world will be judged. It is possible that a letter, supposedly from Paul, had come to the church, or that one of the church prophets had given this false message during a public meeting. Paul writes to explain God's program for the age and to encourage these suffering Christians to remain true to the Lord.

The Thessalonian Christians had a reputation for growing faith, abounding hope, and radiant love, and their difficult experiences were causing their faith, hope, and love to grow. Their testimony was growing as well, for all the churches heard about them and their stand for the Lord. Paul was able to glory in them among all the churches. Their steadfast endurance was an encouragement to other believers. Note too that they were growing in patience. "*Tribulation produces perseverance.*" Of course, "perseverance" in the New Testament is not simply "waiting it out," it is steadfast endurance in the Lord, keeping going when the going is tough. The Christian who prays for more patience must expect more tribulation, for tribulation is the spiritual tool God uses to make us patient.

When suffering comes, it will either make us or break us. If we accept the suffering, yield to God's will, and by faith continue to stand true, then the suffering will cause us to grow. If we resist the suffering, complain to God, and give up in unbelief, then the suffering will break us and weaken our testimony. Paul does not look upon suffering as a burden, but as a blessing. When Paul said that they should be counted "*worthy of the kingdom,*" he is not suggesting that they could earn a place in heaven by their own merit. "Worthy" describes fitness, not merit. God fits us through suffering for the glory that lies ahead. Our suffering here today is preparation for the work God has yet to be revealed.

Steadfastness in suffering is also a testimony to the lost world. It may seem that God is not judging the sins of the world, but this is not true. Pharaoh drowned the babies of Israel, and God drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Judas betrayed Jesus to be hanged on a tree, and Judas went out and hanged himself. Saul tried to slay David with a sword, and was slain with a sword himself. Sinners reap what they sow.

Believers can be confident in suffering because God has chosen us and will never forsake us. The good work that God begins, He will complete. If the sinful world seems to be winning the battle today, we can rest in faith, knowing that they will lose the battle tomorrow. Our responsibility is to live worthy of this high calling and to allow God to work out His perfect will in faith and power.

What should Christians who are in the will of God do when they go through painful testing and trial? They should: (1) Thank God for His salvation and that He is with them; (2) Surrender to the will of God without complaining; (3) Ask God to give wisdom to understand His will; (4) Watch for opportunities to witness and glorify God in the situation; (5) Wait patiently until God's purposes have been fulfilled.

This first chapter is a great encouragement for the believer in these dark days. The world is going downhill toward hell at supersonic speed. People do not want to hear the Word of God. Faithful Christians are suffering while godless unbelievers prosper. It seems as though God has forsaken His own. Not so, says Paul. The believer can rest knowing that God is at work in the world. God has a beautiful plan and purpose for all of His own and will be faithful to complete the work He has begun.

Key Scriptures you will find in 2 Thessalonians

“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. And then the lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and will destroy with the brightness of His coming.” 2 Thess. 2:7-8

“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” 2 Thess. 3:10

“But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.” 2 Thess. 3:13

Studies in the Book of 2 Thessalonians
Lesson 1 - 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
Hope for a Hopeless Word
Good Works Worthy of God's Calling

The Christians in Thessalonica were grateful to God for Paul's first letter, but it did not immediately solve all their problems. In fact, the persecution grew worse and some believers thought they were living in the time of the Tribulation. Then a letter arrived claiming to be from Paul, stating that the Day of the Lord was actually present. Needless to say, the assembly was confused and frightened by this prospect.

To encourage and challenge his audience to do good works worthy of God's calling, Paul, lays a groundwork of sound doctrine. He builds his case with evidence of what the Thessalonians are already doing. His call to persevere in their suffering is based on God's faithfulness to His just standards and purposes. In the end, evil deeds will be punished and good works will be rewarded. Thanksgiving for God's gifts are the proper responses to what God has done and will do on our behalf.

Some of the believers concluded that since the Lord's coming was so near, they ought to quit their jobs and spend their time waiting for Him. This meant that the other members were under an extra burden to care for them. Satan was working overtime; as the lion, he was seeking to devour, and as the serpent, he was seeking to deceive.

It was in response to these needs that Paul wrote his second letter. He began with their most pressing need, the persecution they were experiencing because of their faith.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12 and answer the following questions

1. What do you think Paul's purpose was for writing this letter?

2. What is it about the Thessalonian's faith that makes it right for Paul to part from his normal practice and boast about this church? (See 3-4)

3. What three things did Paul commend the Thessalonian church for? (See 3-4)

4. What difficulties were the Thessalonians experiencing? (See 5-6)

5. How does Paul encourage them? (See 6-7)

6. What kind of "reward" will those who suffer for Christ receive?

7. Who is this "punishment" or divine wrath in Verses 8-9 intended for?

8. How do your own ideas about hell compare with Paul's description here in 8-9?

9. What was Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians? (See 11-12)

10. What can you tell your friends this week that will drive home the importance of knowing God and obeying His gospel?

Finishing Well

What would be an appropriate inscription on your tombstone? What statement would describe your life overall rather than whatever current circumstances you are temporarily facing right now?

When Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica they were in the midst of intense suffering. Paul encouraged them to look beyond their immediate troubles to the return of Christ and the promise they would receive from Him at that time. Their enemies, who were really enemies of the Lord, would be judged and dealt with. By contrast, they would join with their Savior in joy and praise. Paul went on in the next chapter to expand on this theme and its impact on the Thessalonians current difficulties.

God calls on His people to finish their lives well by holding onto the truths that last. He challenges us to maintain lifelong faithfulness and not to be entirely caught up in the here and now, whether good or bad.

As you consider the long term direction of your life, what memories are you creating in others about your values and reputation? What will people choose to remember about you?

Studies in the Book of 2 Thessalonians
Lesson 2 – 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10
Hope for a Hopeless World
The Day of the Lord

Paul comes in this chapter to the heart of his letter, his explanation about the Day of the Lord and the Man of Sin. The Christians were “shaken” instead of established because they had been falsely told that the Day of the Lord was already upon them. Paul explains that certain events must take place before this day of wrath and judgment can come to the world.

“*Falling away.*” Refers to a falling away from the truth of the Word of God. While there were certainly false teachers in Paul’s day, the church at large was united on the truths of the Word of God. If you met another Christian, you knew he believed in the Word of God, the deity of Christ, and the salvation by faith in Christ. This is certainly not true today! We live in a day of “Christian unbelief.” People say they are Christians, yet deny the truths of Christ, and the inspiration of His Word.

Paul promises the rise of a world dictator, the “man of sin.” He is not talking about a world system, but a person who will head up a world system. This “man of sin” contrasts with Christ, the Savior from sin. He is the son of perdition; Christ is the Son of God. He is the liar; Christ is the Truth. Satan will work through the Antichrist in miraculous powers, just as the magicians in Egypt imitated Moses’ miracles. He will imitate Christ’s powers and get the world to accept and worship him.

The Day of the Lord applies to the Gentile nations and the Jews, but not to the church. It is a day of wrath, and the church is not destined for wrath. The purpose of the Tribulation is the punishment of the Gentiles and the purification of the Jewish nation, which by this time has returned to its own land in unbelief. But Antichrist cannot begin his rise to power until Christ has taken the church from the earth. We have been chosen for glory; they are destined for hell. Satan is already working in the world, and we can see its godless activities increasing rapidly. Men would rather believe a lie than the truth.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10 and answer the following questions

1. Rumors were flying around about “the day of the Lord” already happening. Not only that, but the events of 1 Thessalonians had come and gone leaving them behind. What had the Thessalonians seen or heard that affected their emotional and mental state about these events?

2. What three things did Paul say the Thessalonians should not be shaken in mind or troubled by?

3. What two things must take place before the “Day of the Lord” can come?

4. How does Paul reassure the Thessalonians that Christ has not yet returned? What warning does he give them with this encouragement? (See 2:1-4)

5. What does Paul say will happen before the Lord returns? (See 2:3)

6. What is the force that restrains the activities of the antichrist? (See 2:7)

7. With currency it might be easy to pick out the real from the counterfeit. How can you tell the difference between the miracles, signs, and wonders of Satan and those of God's?

8. What does this chapter say regarding the doom of the man of sin? (See 2:8)

9. What evidence is there of Satan's powerful work through the man of lawlessness? (See 2:9-10)

10. In light of everything Paul said here about the events to come, do you think Christ's return is near, or far away? Why?

11. How does this affect your mindset and behavior in the meantime?

Great word from “The Word of Life Study Bible”

Are you anxious about the future of the world? Do hopeless predictions about coming disasters trouble you? Or do dramatic solutions to the worlds many problems hold your curiosity?

Like many people today, the believers in Thessalonica were vulnerable to urgent warnings and announcements related to the future. In fact, certain false teachers of the day took advantage in the people’s interests in such things, playing to their greatest hopes and worst fears about the return of the Lord. In response, Paul appealed for reason and critical thinking based on the clear instructions he had given.

As we read 2 Thessalonians today, we, like the letter’s original readers, need to “stand fast and hold the traditions which we were taught,” the truths of God’s Word. We should avoid fearful guesswork about events related to the Lord’s return and instead be busy about our responsibilities at hand.

Studies in the Book of 2 Thessalonians
Lesson 3 - 2 Thessalonians 2:10-15
Hope for a Hopeless World
Truth or Consequences

2 Thessalonians 11 reads literally, “*That they should believe the lie.*” What is “*the lie*”? Satan is the liar and has passed off many deceptions on the human race. But there is one “lie” that, from the beginning, has led people astray. Satan first spoke it to Eve: “*You shall be as God!*” The lie is the idea that man is his own God and therefore can do whatever he pleases. All of which means that Satan appeals to man’s pride. It was pride that turned Lucifer into Satan. It is pride that traps men into doing Satan’s will in this world. Today, man is making God in his own image. The people Christ will judge not only do not love the truth, but they have “*pleasure in unrighteousness*” (2 Thess. 2:12).

Does this mean that those who have heard the Gospel before the Rapture of the church cannot be saved after the Rapture? Not necessarily. If that were true, then our witness to the lost is condemning them, should Christ return. However, it does mean that no lost sinner can afford to treat God’s truth carelessly or reject God’s Son repeatedly. The human heart becomes harder each time the sinner rejects God’s truth; and this makes it easier to believe Satan’s lies.

How much better it is to follow the example of the Thessalonian believers who received the Word of God to experience salvation, “*a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and through your belief in the truth*” (1 Thess. 2:13) NLV. They received the truth and were saved.

Paul makes a wonderful application in verse 15: “*stand fast.*” Don’t be moved by the world, politics, or false religions. As the end of the age draws near, it will be more and more difficult to live for Christ and serve Him. What should the Christian do? Hold on to the Word of God! Don’t listen to the lies of the devil, the teachings of the cults, the sugar-coated promises of false teachers. Hold to the Word of God! We have in Christ and His Word eternal encouragement and everlasting hope.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:10-15 and answer the following questions

1. What was God's prayer for the Thessalonians? (See 11-12)
2. How does God respond to those who do not love the truth? Why? (See 11-12)
3. What step by step path do those who "*did not believe the truth*" follow?
(See 10-12)
4. How do you decide if a miracle or a miracle worker is from God or from Satan?
5. How did Paul respond to the good news of the Thessalonians growth in Christ?
Why was Paul so thankful?
6. We should always give thanks. Do you give thanks for the things you should give thanks for? What is something you should give thanks for but you don't?

7. In 2:14 why do you believe Paul used the wording “Our Gospel” rather than “The Gospel?”

8. By contrast, what is the result of those who “*stand fast and hold to*” the traditions (truth)? (See 2:15)

9. Is there any area in your life where you need to (*stand firm*)? What might that look like to you?

10. What can you do to “Hold the traditions which you were taught”?

**Final Words from Paul in Regards to
“Standing Fast in the Faith”
1 Corinthians 16:13-14**

“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love” NKJV

“Be on guard, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” NLT

“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” ESV

“Be alert. be firm in your faith, be brave, be strong” GNT

“Watch! Stand firm in the faith! Be courageous! Be strong! WEB

Studies in the Book of 2 Thessalonians
Lesson 4 - 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5
Hope for a Hopeless World
Answers to Prayers

We must keep on working. “Every good word and work” is a good motto to follow in these dark days. Keep on giving out the Word; keep on working for Christ. As we win others to Christ, we are building up the body. When the body is completed, it will be caught away to glory. This is what Peter means by “*hastening the coming of the day of God.*” As long as the church is in the world, Satan’s program of wickedness is held back, but once the church is gone, Satan will have more freedom. He will seek to destroy Israel and ruin mankind. These are great and challenging days. May we be found faithful when He comes!

The coming of Christ is more than a doctrine to examine and study; it is a truth to grip our lives and make us better Christians. It is not enough to know about His coming or to believe it; we must practice it in daily life. Unfortunately, some of the believers at Thessalonica were abusing the teaching of Christ’s return. In this final chapter, Paul persuaded them to change their ways.

What a tremendous power the believer has in prayer! Though Satan is at work in the world, we can still pray to God and see Him answer. Paul’s request was that they pray for his ministry of the Word. The only way to confront Satan’s lies is to share the truth of the Word of God. The Word did have free course among the believers at Thessalonica and was being glorified because they received it and believed it.

He also prayed that God’s servants might be delivered from wicked men. Wherever we take the Gospel, Satan will raise up perverse and evil men to oppose us. These unbelievers oppose the Word itself and even those who would give out the Word. We cannot trust men, but we can trust our faithful God.

Believers need to be patient as they pray and give out the Word. God is able to give us this patience as we grow in our love for Christ. Paul tells us to love His appearing. Where there is love, there will be patience and hope.

Paul couldn't have said it any better. He prays for others and asks for prayer himself and his associates. Both Paul and the Thessalonians are great examples of how we can learn to become the kind of men and women of prayer that God wants us to be.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5 and answer the following questions

1. What is the difference between a prayer and a wish? (See 2:16-17)
2. Is Paul expressing a prayer or a wish in 2:16-17? Why?
3. What final reminders did Paul give to the Thessalonians? (See 3:1)
4. Where have you seen God's Word "run swiftly and be glorified," honoring Christ and bringing people to faith? (See 3:1)
5. What kind of people was Paul referring to in verse 2? Why did he need to be "delivered" from them?
6. What specific things do Paul and his coworkers pray for in 3:1-5?

7. Who does Paul base his confidence in? Why is this important? (See 3:4)

8. When did you first take God at His Word and experience “*confidence in the Lord*”? (See 3:4)

9. How does God direct the hearts of His people? (See 3:5)

10. What area of prayer do you struggle with most? Explain why.

- a. How to talk to God and not at God
- b. How to listen and understand what God is saying to me
- c. Why God seems to answer some prayers and not others
- d. How to get past my “want list” and pray unselfishly for others
- e. Trusting that the Lord “*is faithful*” as I continue to battle with the flesh (See 3:3).

11. Name one or more answers to prayer you have received in the past few months?

Studies in the Book of 2 Thessalonians
Lesson 5 - 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18
Hope for a Hopeless World
Order in the Church

Some of the believers had misapplied the teaching concerning the return of Christ. “If the Lord is coming back soon,” they reasoned, “then we ought to give up our jobs and wait for Him to come!” Down through the ages, certain groups have made this same mistake. They have left the world, gone off to a mountain, and waited for the Lord to come back, only to return home embarrassed. Paul warned the true believers to withdraw from these lazy Christians who were disobeying the Word that the offenders might be ashamed and correct their foolish ways. The faithful were to treat the offenders as brothers and sisters, not as enemies, but they were not to put up with their sin.

He pointed back to his own teaching and example. While with them, Paul worked with his own hands and supported himself and his co-laborers, He had repeatedly taught them to work faithfully as Christians and care for their own needs. “*If any man does not work, he should not eat!*” was the principle Paul followed. Of course, the church cared for those who had honest needs and could not work, but the church is not obligated to help those who are able to work but who will not. Those who refuse to work become busybodies; they have time on their hands, and they interfered with other people’s business. This creates a bad testimony to the unsaved.

The Word of God is to be heard and obeyed. We ought not to encourage laziness. If each Christian would obey the Word of God, the church would be holier, happier, and more effective in witness and service. One of the strengths of the Thessalonian church was its attitude toward the Word of God. They heard and received the Word, believed it, and shared it with others.

Paul’s personal blessing deals with peace and grace. How these believers needed peace! They were experiencing great tribulation; some of their number had died; some were living disorderly lives. We can have peace in our hearts if we surrender to Christ, believe His promises, and look for His return. Nothing will encourage the tested believer like the expectation of Christ’s return!

Paul added his personal signature and blessing of grace, which was the way he closed all of his letters.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18 and answer the following questions

1. How should we treat those in the church who are idle or lazy?
2. What gave Paul the authority to speak boldly about this subject? (See 3:7-9)
3. What kind of example did Paul provide the church at Thessalonica in regard to work?
4. How would you describe Paul's attitude toward these idle/lazy brothers and sisters? (Is he being fair? Mean? Pastoral? Arrogant?)
5. Why do you think Paul refused financial help even though he had the right to receive it? (See 8-9)

Insight

"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." (2 Thess. 3:10) Contemporary Jewish teaching records Rabbi Abbahu as saying: "If I don't work, I do not eat." The second century Christian work, "The Didache" instructs Christians on a related rule of hospitality, that travelers could and should be given a three day provision, and if they stay longer they should use their craft: "Let him work for his bread, so that one shall not live with you in idleness as a Christian." Paul states his rule as a command to be obeyed.

6. What can people turn into who don't work? (See 10-11)

7. What is the danger of being a busybody (a meddling or prying person?) What command did Paul make of these busybodies?

8. What would be most difficult about following through on the enforcements that Paul has imposed on those who live off others?

9. Paul says to avoid those brothers and sisters who are idle. How should we as Christians treat those who are idle outside the church? (See 3:14-15)

10. Paul ends his letter to the Thessalonians with a blessing of peace and grace. Why would the Thessalonians and believers today, need these two things? (See 3:16-18)

11. How have you changed as a result of studying 2 Thessalonians? (It might be an attitude, an opinion, a thought, or a relationship with another person)

A Command to Work

God wants Christians to take responsibility to provide for their material needs and those of their families. In fact, 2 Thess. 3:10 states this is a command.

God has created a world of resources for this purpose. He gives us authority, along with strength and skills, to use those resources to earn our living. Work is His gift to us, a means of supplying what we need.

Obviously, there are times when grown children must care for their parents or grandparents. Likewise, the church community sometimes must assume responsibility for those in need.

Earlier in 1 Thess. 4:12, Paul explains why: 1. Because of the testimony that Christians have among unbelievers. Believers who beg, borrow unnecessarily or steal, discredit Christ and the church. 2. Because God doesn't want His children to "Lack" what they need.