

A Study of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians

Week Five

2 Thessalonians 1:4-2:12

Day One

5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

v. 5 – “All this” refers to the patient endurance that the Thessalonians have shown in all their trials. Yes, that’s right—trials are an indication that you have done something right, not something wrong. I believe there are two aspects to your trials. The first is what those trials work in you. The second is to prove the reality of what God has done in your life. Let’s consider the second point.

Think of something you are going through now. Then try to envision that same thing happening to you five years ago. **How would you have reacted?** Probably not as well as you are today. So your trial is proving the good work that God has done in your life to conform you to the image of Jesus.

In my own life, I could not have endured the financial trials in the past that I am today. But I am rejoicing and victorious because of the work of God in my life. The trials have tested me and proved that His work is good and real. For that, I thank God!

v. 6 – While you go through trials, it may seem like God isn’t watching or doesn’t care. Neither is true. God is not only watching, He is keeping track. And He will repay your enemies. But you must be patient as He does this, for God will do that on His terms and according to His timetable—which is always a lot slower than ours. But don’t mistake God’s slowness for apathy:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

The same God who is patient with your enemies has been patient with you. Don’t begrudge others the same grace that God has given you.

v. 7 – This verse seems to refer to the Second Coming of Jesus, but how will that comfort and help us now? The only thing I can say is that we trust the Lord to make everything right. If He doesn’t do it in this lifetime, then we have another one to come where He will reward everyone for everything they have done, whether good or evil. **So, are you discouraged? Are you in a trial that seems like it will never end?** Take hope. The Lord is watching and keeping score. He will not let your trial go one day longer than

necessary. In the meantime, try to identify all the good things the Lord is doing in the midst of your trial and give thanks *in*, if not *for*, the trial itself.

Day Two

8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

v. 8 – So much for the doctrine that Jesus isn't the only way to heaven. Jesus is the only way and said so Himself:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:6-7).

Was Jesus a liar? Absolutely not! What He just accommodating the Jews to make them feel like they were the chosen of God? Not at all! Jesus was also the truth, so He could not say or be anything that wasn't absolutely true. If He said He is the only way, then that's all there is to it. Sorry Buddha and Mohammed. Jesus is the only way. **Yet if you believe that, what you are doing about it? By that, I mean what are you doing in missions work to see those who are lost without Jesus find Him? Are you praying? Giving? Going? Supporting those who go?** If we really believe that Jesus is the only way, then we should act like it, devoting time and resources to the work of saving as many as possible from their darkness and sin. This belief cannot exist as a personal preference but as a call to action.

v. 9 – This is the reality of those who die in a state of not knowing Jesus. They will be punished with eternal separation from God. Someone once said that if you don't choose to meet God in His mercy, then you meet Him in another aspect of His character represented by fire:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Could the fires of hell be just another manifestation of God? I don't want to get weird or go off on a tangent, so I will stop the deliberation here. Suffice to say that hell and its flames are real.

v. 10 – Paul encouraged the readers that they would see the Lord return in majesty and power. This return would not represent judgment for them, but salvation. That is why I don't appreciate anyone who turns the Lord's return into an opportunity for fear and speculation. There are many making a lot of money off their silly interpretations of the

Lord's return. That return is the blessed hope of the Church and, no matter what happens before that return, is something to be eagerly anticipated and celebrated. I really could care less who the Antichrist is or what he will do. I know the Christ and that is all that matters. **Do you agree? Are you anxious about His return or the circumstances of the end? Why?**

Day Three

11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. 12 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.

v. 11 – With what in mind? Paul was referring to the fact that the Thessalonians had believed in Jesus through Paul's testimony. As a result, Paul prayed for them constantly. What did he ask for on their behalf? Two things: That in God's power He would 1) fulfill every good purpose and 2) fulfill every faith-filled act. If God infuses your purposes, goals and actions with His power, then they are bound to succeed. So Paul was praying for their success! But they had to have an idea of where they were going (purpose) and take steps to get there (action). So we are back to the basic issue of faith. Faith isn't doctrine, but what you do with the doctrine you believe.

Do you believe Jesus was raised from the dead? What are you doing about that belief? You have the same resurrection power that lives in you. Are you praying for the sick? Taking some action to further the gospel or equip God's people? I really don't care what you believe at this point in my life; I only care what you are *doing* with what you believe!

v. 12 – Why did Paul pray these two things for them? So that the name of Jesus would be glorified and that the believers would also be glorified in Jesus. Jesus is willing to share His glory with those who have purpose and act. It isn't enough to talk about God's glory. In some sense you must earn it or at least do what is required to see it manifest. Consider what Jesus said:

I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began (John 17:4-5).

How did Jesus glorify the Father? By finishing the work He was given to do. **Do you think you will glorify God in any other way? So what is the work He has given you to do? What are your goals? What is your purpose?** If you need help, go to <http://www.purposequest.com> and find all kinds of resources to help you clarify both. Then get busy and glorify the Father and Jesus by finishing the work they have assigned for you to do.

Day Four

2:1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

vs. 1&2 – It seems that there were demonic rumors and false teachings concerning the return of the Lord then and now. It is fascinating that there is such a morbid fascination with the end and so little preoccupation with the present. If the Lord is returning soon, why doesn't the church spend more on missions? If the Lord's return is imminent, why do we spend millions on buildings that will soon be rendered useless according to this interpretation? I don't get it. As I stated in my Revelation studies, there are many who have enriched themselves by concocting fairy tales about the Second Coming. I hope they are investing their money in missions and outreach to save as many as possible with the few days we have left before Jesus returns!

In Paul's day, the false report was that the return of the Lord had already come. Perhaps someone wrote a novel about it! At any rate, this report had caused alarm among the young believers. Paul now sought to comfort them with the truth.

v. 3 – Deception is a real possibility when you are dealing with spiritual things. Demonic doctrines and unscrupulous men and women have regularly deceived otherwise intelligent people. That is why being grounded in the Word and a local church are so important, for they both serve as safeguards to keep us from error and deception.

Paul referred to a rebellion and the man of lawlessness. This has commonly been interpreted to mean the so-called Antichrist. My own reading and research here lead me to believe that Paul was referring to Satan, who is indeed doomed to destruction after a period of evil deeds. I would refer the reader to my Revelation studies for my comprehensive views on this subject. But I believe that there is a spirit of "anti-Christ"—a spirit that is against Christ. For instance, Islam is an antichrist doctrine, for it denies the divinity and supremacy of Christ. Buddhism is also an antichrist doctrine, making room for many "Christs," namely each seeker of truth.

I refuse to spend my life looking for a literal man of evil, when evil is present in so many systems and doctrines. Suffice it to say that there is a spirit of antichrist working in the world and I suspect it will get more powerful. But then again, so will the work of Christ. I am glad I am on the winning side and I will not give in one minute to idle speculations about things God did not feel important enough to give us more clarity and insight.

Do you agree with this? Why or why not? What do you believe about the end? If it is imminent, does your lifestyle reflect that belief?

Day Five

4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time.

v. 4 – Once again, I know that the “traditional” interpretation is that this verse refers to the man called the Antichrist. But how can the Antichrist set himself up in God’s temple, if there is no temple? It is my opinion that this refers to Satan, whose goal all along has been to assume the place of God, to receive the worship due only to God. After all, it is Satan himself who would be behind any “antichrist” movement, trying to deflect glory from God to himself.

I never put any emphasis on the devil in my praying, preaching or teaching. He has enough people speaking for him. I speak for God, who is my one and only focus. I am not belittling Satan’s role in the scheme of things, nor do I underestimate his power or craftiness. I have chosen to take refuge in the Lord and keep my eyes focused on Him. I don’t want to know any more of how the devil works; I want to know more of how God works.

v. 5 – Paul was a good pastor. He was settling his sheep who had been unnerved by a false report that the Lord’s return had already occurred. It is important that you be in touch with those among whom you live and minister, speaking accurately into the issues that trouble them. I have known a few pastors who travel and are out of touch with their people. Their pulpit ministry and the programs of the church are out of touch with where the people are. Even though Paul was away from this church, he knew what was going on and wrote accordingly.

v. 6 – What was holding Satan back? Why the Lord, of course! Don’t ever forget that God is in charge, not Satan! And when Satan is released, it will not be to harm God’s people but to punish those who have chosen an anti-Christ instead of the Christ. Even if we lose our lives at Satan’s hand, he cannot harm us! Consider this story from the book of Job:

One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything

he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD (Job 1:6-12).

Does this appear that Satan is free to do whatever he wants, whenever and wherever he wants? That is why I never make him the focus of my ministry; God is the focus, for the Lord rules all of creation. **Where is your focus? On God or on the evil one?**

Day Six

7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10a and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.

v. 7 – God is in control—that is our confidence in times of trouble or distress. The world is evil, but not as evil as it could be. God is working to contain those workers of iniquity who would wreak havoc on the world. I was watching a documentary on World War II recently, and the level of suffering and terror the world over was horrendous. There were some then who thought that the end was near and the “antichrist” was Hitler. I repeat that I don’t believe there will be one literal antichrist, but a continuing series of evil men who will set themselves up as leaders, deluding many and opposing the Church and Jesus. They have always failed and they will always fail, because God is in control and He rules over all.

v. 8 – Not everyone can see Satan for what he is doing, but the return of the Lord will reveal Satan and all his evil work and workers. Before His return, Satan will be revealed by Jesus’ breath, which is His Spirit as preached and revealed by the preaching of the Church. Don’t underestimate the power of declaring God’s word, whether through the written or spoken Word. And please don’t give any of God’s glory to the devil in any way, shape or form. The devil has enough representatives; you be a representative of Christ.

v. 9 – There are some who have been so paranoid about false miracles that they have rejected or become suspicious of real miracles. I am told that those who are trained to identify counterfeit money never study counterfeit bills. Instead they study the real notes so that they can easily identify the fake. Don’t make Satan or his counterfeit works your focus; instead focus on the real Word and works and you will be equipped to handle the bogus when you encounter it.

v. 10a – Those who are perishing will look for confirmation of their false beliefs and doctrines.

This is why I speak to them in parables : "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it (Matthew 13:13-17).

God will not deliver anyone from his or her "friends" of false beliefs and deception. In fact, He will actually help them stay where they are once they have hardened their hearts.

Day Seven

10b They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

v. 10b – God desires that all men be saved:

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

Yet man is free to choose and once a person has chosen a course, refusing to be saved, then God honors that choice and gives that person more of what they have already chosen:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one

another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:18-32).

This is not a quick process, however, but rather takes place over a period of time when a person or people continually reject God's overtures and willingly turn to wickedness. At some point, God will give them over to the course they have chosen.

How long does it take for this to happen? I don't know the mind of God. Should we try to determine who these people are? Absolutely not, for then we may hold back on declaring the gospel. We may also set ourselves up as judges instead of ambassadors for Christ. But we must know that some will willingly choose to reject Jesus and, if they do that repeatedly, may find themselves in a hardened place from which there is no retreat or repentance.