

2 Thessalonians

The Lord of Peace

Purpose

To encourage those believers who were being persecuted, to dispel rumors regarding the end times, and to address the unruly, idle members who were causing disunity in the congregation

Summary

During his second church-planting expedition, the Apostle Paul and his teammates (Timothy and Silas) spent at least three Sabbaths in Thessalonica before they were run out of town by angry Jews (*Acts 17:1-10*). Because of the nature of their departure, Paul was concerned for the well-being of the Christians there, so he wrote a letter to them (*18:5*). He also sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to encourage their faith. Timothy returned to Paul with a glowing report (*1 Thess. 3:6, 7*).

However, the new believers in Thessalonica experienced a great deal of persecution. There was also a flurry of false teaching and rumor-milling, and several members who had quit their jobs to wait for Christ to return were causing trouble. Therefore, Paul sent a second letter. While the letter was very informative regarding evil and the end times, the overarching theme of the letter was God's grace and peace. Despite their difficult circumstances, Paul encouraged Thessalonian Christians with the truth that God was with them, to walk with them through their trials.

Themes

- **Persecution:** Persecution is to be expected among believers. Jesus was persecuted, so shall we. The enemy persecutes us to frighten us, to discourage us, and to hinder the work of the Gospel. However, God uses persecution for His good purposes and to purify and strengthen our faith.
- **Divine Justice:** Sin is the source of all our problems. The world's system reflects sin's influence in every aspect. At times, it appears that evil has triumphed over good. But God is just and, sooner or later, He will hold all sinners accountable for their deeds.
- **The Man of Lawlessness:** The apex of evil on the earth is the rise of man of lawlessness or the Anti-Christ. Under the influence of Satan, he will rule the earth and do his best to destroy God's people and influence. However, in the end, he will be destroyed at Christ's return.
- **Work:** God created us to work. Work is not a result of the curse of sin, rather it is a blessing of God. By working, we become independent and self-reliant, and we are able to provide for ourselves and our loved ones. Laziness, therefore, is a sin, and Paul confronted it head on.
- **Peace:** Christ never promised His followers an escape from their trials but He did promise to give them internal peace, through His indwelling Spirit, in the midst of their trials.

Leading Ideas

- Persecution has a refining agency; it reveals believers who are genuine in their faith (*1:1-5*).
- God is just and, sooner or later, He will repay us for our deeds (*1:6-12*).
- One day Satan will rule the earth but his throne will be destroyed by the true King (*2:1-12*).
- In a cruel and chaotic world, we have God's Word to guide us along the way (*2:13-17*).
- The power in our prayer is in the One to whom we pray (*3:1-5*).
- Work is a gift of God. Those who do not work are rebelling against Him (*3:6-15*).
- God does not remove us from circumstances but walks through them with us (*3:16-18*).

Penmen

The Apostle Paul was the primary author with the full support of his co-laborers Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy. Note the pronouns "we, us, and our."

Recipients

The believers in Thessalonica (originally called Therma, today Salonica), in the province of Macedonia, along the *Via Egnatia* highway

Date Written

Historical evidence places this letter around 51 AD, written in Corinth, shortly after his first letter to the same church).

Special Feature

Because of Paul's emphasis on the "Day of the Lord" or the Second Coming of Christ (eschatology), his two letters to the Thessalonians are often referred to as the "eschatological letters."

Key Verse

"Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!"

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Worthy of the Kingdom

Paul's Salutation

¹ “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: ²Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; ⁴therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. ⁵This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which indeed you are suffering.”

Leading Idea

Persecution has a refining agency, in that it reveals true believers who are genuine in their faith.

As one would expect to find in the opening of a letter, there are three essential pieces included – the author(s), the recipient(s), and a greeting (*v.1*). The Apostle Paul was the primary writer; the other two men, Silvanus and Timothy, were co-laborers with Paul. Silvanus was the Latin name for Silas, one of “the leading men among the brethren” (*Acts 15:22*), whom Paul asked to join him and revisit the churches he planted in Asia Minor (*15:40*). Silas is later mentioned as helping Peter write one of his letters (*1 Peter 5:12*). Timothy was a young disciple whom Paul and Silas met along the way. He was highly regarded by the people. Paul asked him to assist them on their mission (*Acts 16:1-3; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philemon 1*). Timothy was instrumental as a messenger (*Phil. 2:19; 1 Thess. 3:1-7*), as an eventual pastor at Ephesus (*1 Tim. 1:3*), and as the successor to Paul’s ministry.

Thessalonica was a populous trade city along the *Via Egnatia* (highway) in Macedonia. As was Paul’s custom, he entered the synagogue and “reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures,” convincing them that Jesus was the Messiah (*Acts 17:1-10*). Among those converted were Jason (*17:5*), Aristarchus, and Secundus (*20:4*) and a number of women. Because of opposition by jealous Jews, concerned friends escorted Paul and his teammates out of town. They only spent three Sabbaths in Thessalonica (at least), which explains Paul’s urgency to write a letter to the new believers there (*1 Thess. 2:17-3:2*).

When Paul described the church of the Thessalonians, he said that they were “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*v.1*). This phrase was intentional, as it recognized the divinity of Christ, the fact that He was and is one with and the same as God, a claim that would’ve separated Christians from the Jews. It was this claim that caused the original uproar in Thessalonica (*Acts 17:2, 3; 1 John 2:23*). Paul added his signature greeting – grace and peace (*v.2*). Grace is God’s unmerited favor (the cause) and peace is an undisturbed calmness (the effect), not from our circumstances but in the midst of them.

Paul prayed often for the believers in Thessalonica (*v.3*), thanking God for their response to the Gospel, which would have been an encouragement to them. Here is a good reminder for us not only to pray for others but also to tell them we are doing so. Next, Paul mentioned the faith and love of the Thessalonian church (*v.3*). Regarding their faith, the Thessalonians remained committed to Christ despite the opposition and persecution they were facing. Because of that persecution, their faith was “greatly enlarged.” Here is a reminder that it is in difficult circumstances in which our faith grows.

Also, despite their persecution, or perhaps because of it, the love of the believers grew “ever greater.” It is on the front lines of a battle where the bonds of friendship and trust are forged between soldiers; so also enduring persecution together strengthens the bond of love between believers. As a result, Paul commended the Thessalonians and expressed his excitement for what God was doing in their midst. He made it a point to tell other churches about them, “of their perseverance and faith in the midst of their persecution and affliction” (*v.4*).

Though persecution is a work of unrighteous men, acting on behalf of our spiritual enemy, railing against the kingdom of God, it is the wisdom of God or His “righteous judgment” (*v.5*) to use that persecution to purify and strengthen His people. Persecution has a unique refining agency, in that it reveals true believers, those who are genuine, and not pretenders, in their faith. Thus, Paul wrote that suffering is used to prove us “worthy of the kingdom” (*v.5*), not that enduring persecution earns us favor or salvation, but rather that persecution proves our faithfulness to the Savior.

Though we often fear persecution or suffering, it is the fire through which the metal of our faith is refined and strengthened. Therefore, as James wrote, we should “consider it all joy when we encounter various trials, for the testing of our faith produces endurance” (*James 1:2, 3*).

⁶ “For after all, it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ¹⁰when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed – for our testimony to you was believed. ¹¹To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith and power, ¹²so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Divine Justice

Retribution for Our Deeds

Leading Idea

God is just and, sooner or later, He will repay all people for their deeds.

In the first half of this chapter (v.1-5), Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by explaining to them that God was using their afflictions to purify and strengthen their faith. In the second half of this chapter (v.6-12), Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by assuring them that God would deal with those who afflicted them, in His timing. Now, before we look at *how* He would do it, let's first consider *why* He would do it.

Paul wrote, “It is only *just* for God to repay” them (v.6). God is just, meaning that He gives everyone his due, whether reward or punishment (*Deut. 32:4; Psalm 7:11*). Because God is holy and righteous, all sin is offensive to Him and, therefore, all sinners must be punished. Those who do not conform to His standards of righteousness must be condemned. However, because of His great love, God sent His Son Jesus to pay the penalty for those who believe in Him. His wrath towards our sinfulness has been abated by His grace and mercy. Still, those who reject Christ's sacrifice on their behalf will be held accountable for their sin. They will not escape, but the Lord will repay them for their offenses.

So then, how will God repay them? God sometimes chooses to repay the wicked while they live. He strikes with “affliction those who afflict” others (v.6). However, it oftentimes appears that the wicked get away with their wickedness and God does nothing about it. Be assured, they will not escape. Paul wrote that those who “do not know God and who do not obey the Gospel” will be dealt with when Jesus returns (v.7, 8). At that time, He will “deal out retribution” (repayment) to them all, giving them what they deserve (v.8).

What is it that the wicked deserve? What will be their punishment? “These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction,” Paul wrote (v.9). What does that mean and what does that include? They will spend eternity “away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (v.9). This passage presents a quandary. If God is omnipresent, meaning everywhere at all times, then how can hell be a “separation from God”? We know that God is the architect of hell, and He is the judge who sentences people to hell. God will be there, not to bless people but to punish them. When Paul wrote that the wicked will spend eternity “away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power,” he meant that the wicked will be cut off from God's grace, God's mercy. There will no longer be any chance of hope or communication with Him. The Lord will have written them off, turned His back, and left them to their punishment. Justice will be served (*Romans 2:6; Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12*).

Notice that persecution will end someday, when “Jesus will be revealed with his mighty angels in flaming fire” (v.7). Also, when He returns, “He will be glorified in His saints and marveled at among all who have believed,” which will include the Thessalonians (“for our testimony to you was believed, v.11). The Lord will be glorified “in His saints” and His saints “will be glorified in Him” (v.12). Two things here, when Jesus returns, every tongue will confess and every knee will bow and all will proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. He will be glorified as He deserves. Also, Christ's followers will be glorified or sanctified in “body, soul, and spirit” (*1 Thess. 5:23*) as He promised (*Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:30*). What a day that will be!

Finally, Paul wrote that he prayed for two things for the Thessalonians, that the Lord would count them “worthy of their calling and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith and power” (v.11). The Lord has called us to Himself, saved us from our sin, given us His Spirit, and equipped us with gifts for His purposes – to propagate the Gospel and advance His kingdom. Are we doing what He's called us to do, or are we wasting our time, talents, and treasures on ourselves? May God fulfill every desire we have for goodness, to glorify Him, every work of faith to bless others in His name. “If you abide in Him and He abides in you, ask what you wish and it shall be done for you” (*John 15:7*).

¹ “We request with regard to the coming of our Lord and our gathering to Him, ²that you not be shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit, a message, or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³Let no deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴who exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵Do you not remember me telling you these things? ⁶You know what restrains him, so that in his time he will be revealed. ⁷For the mystery of lawlessness is at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. ⁸Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with His mouth and end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power, signs, and false wonders, ¹⁰and with the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. ¹¹For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, ¹²in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.”

The Man of Lawlessness

The Terrible Tyrant of the Tribulation

Leading Idea

One day Satan will rule the earth, but his throne will be destroyed by the return of the true King.

[Note: This passage has been modified to fit the space of the margin.]

In this passage, Paul dispelled the rumors and set the record straight regarding the timing of the Day of the Lord. When he mentioned this event in his first letter (*1 Thess. 5:1-10*), he described it as a time of wrath and destruction. Because the Thessalonian believers were experiencing so much persecution, rumors were circulating that they were living in the Day of the Lord. Thus, he cautioned his readers against listening to anyone perpetrating this lie (*v. 1, 2*). He then informed them of events or signs that must take place before the Day of the Lord would occur.

Paul’s first clue is that “the apostasy comes first” (*v.3*), a general rebellion or turning away from God, Christianity, or all organized religion, for that matter, on a global scale. Paul’s second clue is that the person behind this apostasy, “the man of lawlessness” or “son of destruction,” will be revealed (*v.3*). The Bible describes this individual with many names – “the little horn” (*Dan. 7:8, 24-26*), “the prince who is to come” (*Dan. 9:26*), “the worthless shepherd” (*Zech. 11:17*), “the beast” (*Rev. 13:1-17*), “the one who comes in his own name” (*John 5:43*), and, of course, “the Anti-Christ” (*1 John 2:18*).

Paul described this arrogant leader as one “who exalts himself above all gods, who takes his seat in the temple of God, and who displays himself as God” (*v.4*). After the Jewish Temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem (it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD), during the first half of the seven-year Tribulation period, the Anti-Christ will break his word of peace, exalt himself by sitting on the throne of God (Ark of the Covenant), and persecute God’s people mercilessly (*Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15*).

Evidently, these events are already in motion and set to occur – “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work” (*v.7*) – but there is something or someone restraining them from happening (*v.6, 7*). Though Paul told the Thessalonians who or what this restraining force was, he does not reveal that information in his letter. Thus, we don’t know for sure the identity of the restrainer. Scholars have offered many suggestions, but I lean towards the Holy Spirit as the restrainer. He indwells all believers and empowers His Church to be salt and light in this fallen world. When the Church is removed by the rapture, then that enlightened preservative agent will be no more and spiritual darkness will prevail.

The man of lawlessness will employ many strategies to enthrone himself worldwide. He will assume all political power. He will use signs, wonders (although false), and deception unlike anything seen before, all driven by “the activity of Satan,” of course (*v.9, 10*). Those who are left behind after the rapture will be vulnerable to believe any lies. Since they “did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” and the Lord sends upon them “a deluding influence. They will believe what is false and ultimately be judged for their sin and wickedness (*v.11, 12*).

Satan will finally claim publicly what he has longed for privately since the beginning – to be like God in that the creatures of God will worship him as their savior and king (*Isa. 14; Ezek. 28*). Now, the man of lawlessness is not Satan; he is a man. However, he will be empowered and motivated by Satan’s influence. For a brief time, no one will contest him and those who try will be destroyed. However, when Christ Jesus returns, in all His glory, with His armies from heaven, the reign of the lawless one will cease. The Lord will slay him with the breath of His mouth and his reign will end by the Lord’s appearance (*v.8*; see also *Isa. 11:4; Rev. 19:15*).

Though we live in a wicked world, it is nothing like what it will be in the day when the man of lawlessness is revealed. His reign of terror will be fraught with unprecedented evil. Thank God for His sovereignty and that, in His power, He will destroy such wickedness and restore peace on the earth.

¹³ “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. ¹⁴It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. ¹⁶Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, ¹⁷comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.”

Election

John 1:13

Acts 13:46-48

Romans 8:33; 9:15, 16

1 Corinthians 1:30

Ephesians 1:3-5

Colossians 3:12

2 Timothy 2:10

Titus 1:1

1 Peter 1:1, 2

Stand Firm

Holding to the Tradition of Truth

Leading Idea

In the midst of a cruel and chaotic world, we have God’s Word to guide us along the way.

This passage is a continuation of the previous one (1:5-2:12), in which Paul described the “man of lawlessness,” the Anti-Christ, and the signs that must precede him. He also told the Thessalonians what would happen to those who “did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (v.10). They will be judged for their wickedness and sentenced to hell or “eternal destruction” (1:9).

As a follow-up to those harsh words, Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by reminding them that they had nothing to fear. First, in contrast to those who are enemies of God, Paul called his readers “beloved (or greatly loved) by the Lord” (v.13). His love for us is great, in that He sent His only Son to die on our behalf, so that He might redeem us from our fallen state (*John 3:16*).

Second, Paul pointed out that God had “chosen them from the beginning for salvation” (v.13; see also *1 Thess. 1:4*). The process of salvation is initiated by God and people respond accordingly. Here, then, is the doctrine of election or pre-destination, the idea that God chose at the beginning, “before the foundation of the world” (*Eph. 1:4*), those whom He would rescue in salvation. This topic surfaced several times in Paul’s two letters to the Thessalonians (1:6, 9; 5:9; 2 Thess. 2:13). Space does not allow a full explanation of election here, but we must recognize its validity and importance because the New Testament abounds with references to it (see the margin for examples).

Paul described salvation as “sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (v.13). The word sanctification means “the act of making holy.” The second definition of sanctification is “the act of consecrating or of setting apart for a sacred purpose.” This process of making us holy has three phases. First, there is *positional* sanctification, which occurs at the moment of salvation. We are instantly made right with God by the Holy Spirit (what Paul described here, v. 13). Our position is changed from that of a sinner deserving God’s wrath to a saint who, because of Christ, is made flawless in God’s eyes (*Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:5; Col. 1:13*). God is the initiator of this first phase. In our original sinful state, we can do nothing to change our position before Him. Therefore, salvation is a work of God not men.

The second phase of sanctification is *progressive* sanctification, which believers experience during their lifetime, as the Spirit of God conforms us externally (as we already are internally) into the image of Christ. In this phase, we cooperate with God. The third phase is that of *permanent* sanctification, in which the Lord Jesus will complete His work in us at His return (*Phil. 1:6*). We will be made like Him.

Along with positional sanctification by the Spirit, Paul added that we are saved by “faith in the truth” (v.13). We put our trust in Him who, by His sinless life, sacrificial death, and miraculous resurrection, can make us right with God. However, that faith is not of ourselves but is from God (*Eph. 2:8, 9*). The Lord chose some to be saved, so that they may be sanctified and ultimately glorified by Him in the end (v. 14, *Rom. 8:30*). This salvation is a reflection of His glory and goodness and not our own.

Paul challenged the Thessalonians to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught...” (v.15), not to listen to the rumors and lies. What Paul shared with them through his teaching and letter was truth, God’s Word to them. We should always elevate God’s Word above worldly philosophy. The world’s ideas are man-centered and oftentimes irrational or ludicrous. Only God’s Word is stable ground on which we can stand firm. It is steady, unchanging, and reliable.

Finally, Paul asked the Lord to “comfort and strengthen” his readers as they pressed on in their “good work and words” (v.16, 17). In the midst of a cruel and chaotic world, we can take courage in the fact that God has destined us for “eternal comfort” and that we have His truth to guide us along the way.

The Power of Prayer

Putting Faith in the Faithful One

¹ “Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; ²and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith. ³But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. ⁴We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. ⁵May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.”

Leading Idea

The power in our prayer is in the One to whom we pray.

We have already reached the end of Paul’s short letter to the Thessalonians, as he began this section with the word “finally.” It is our natural tendency to dismiss the closing of a letter. However, Paul still had much to say, beginning with this passage (v.1-5).

First, he asked that the Thessalonians pray for them, “that the word of the Lord would spread rapidly and be glorified...” (v.1). The fact that Paul asked them to pray for him indicates that he believed in the power of prayer, for as James wrote, “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:16). While God has His plans and purposes, He invites His people to bring their needs before Him in prayer, with persistence (Luke 18:1), with thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6), with faith (James 1:5), within His will (Matt. 6:10), for His glory not our own (John 14:13, 14), and from right motives. Prayer is not about the words we say or the things we do (close our eyes, bow our heads, fold our hands, etc.). The power in our prayer is in the One to whom we pray. Prayer is not about us, but rather about the One in whom we trust. Our faith is in Him. He loves us. He wants to hear from us, and He cares for us, as a father cares for his children.

Notice what Paul asked in prayer, “that the words of the Lord would spread rapidly and be glorified.” He did not ask that he be glorified or that his work be successful. Rather he asked that God would be glorified and that His word would be successful. Often times our prayers are self-centered rather than God-centered. The Lord does want us to bring our needs to Him but is that all we ask?

Paul also asked for protection, “to be rescued from perverse and evil men, for not all have faith” (v.2). This prayer request assumes that evil men will be out to prevent the spread of the Gospel. Why? Why do they care to stop something if it does not pertain to them? They do not prevent the Gospel for their own sake but rather on behalf of the one they “work for.” It is Satan, our spiritual enemy, who cannot stand the advance of the Gospel. He cannot allow its influence to threaten his territorial reign over the hearts and minds of men. Thus, he moves antagonistic people to stand in the way of Gospel agents.

Though men are not faithful, Paul pointed out that “the Lord is faithful” (v.3). He is not like us, fickle, changing, and inconsistent. Rather God is reliable, constant, and always trustworthy. Though the evil one may attempt to resist our work and ministry of the Gospel, the Lord will “strengthen and protect us” from him (v.3). Battling the forces of evil is tiring, discouraging, and seemingly unending. A constant barrage of spiritual attack can even tempt us to let down our guard, to fall away from our spiritual disciplines, even become unfaithful in our walk with the Lord. But God promises never to leave us or forsake us. He will provide strength for us to endure, if we will trust Him in our trouble.

Despite the persecution and spiritual attack that the Thessalonians were facing, Paul expressed his belief that they would persevere. “We have confidence that you are doing and will continue to do what we command” (v.4). On the surface, this verse may seem selfish or cruel of Paul, in that he commanded them to do anything. However, we must remember that, as the Apostle of Christ, Paul’s words were God’s words (1 Thess. 2:13; 5:27). His commands carried with them authority that was more than human. They were divine. Even today, we must view Paul’s words as God’s words. He was not speaking or writing these things out of some selfish motivation. Rather he was being obedient to God to share whatever the Lord inspired him to write.

Finally, Paul asked the Lord to “direct their hearts into the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ” (v.5). Rather than allowing the enemy’s attacks to push us further away from God, Paul prayed that circumstances would push the Thessalonians towards God; and, as a result, they would find God’s love and faithfulness – “the steadfastness of Christ.” In a sea of troubles, God is our constant star.

⁶ “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, ⁸nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; ⁹not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. ¹¹For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. ¹²Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. ¹³But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. ¹⁴If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. ¹⁵Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

The Gift of Work

A Blessing Not a Curse

Leading Idea

Work is a gift of God. Those who do not work are rebelling against His established order.

In this passage, Paul addressed an issue that had been plaguing the Thessalonian congregation – unruly or undisciplined people (v.6). Evidently, some of the Thessalonian believers were convinced that Jesus’ return was so imminent that they quit their jobs to wait for Him. However, when Jesus did not return, these people had no income and, therefore, could not sustain themselves. They needed money, food, shelter, and the basic necessities of life. Since they no longer had a job, they did nothing during the day but waste time “acting like busybodies” (v.11). Thus, they became unruly or undisciplined.

To be unruly is to disregard restraints or laws or to become ungovernable. To be undisciplined is to live an unstructured life or to become disorderly. These unruly or undisciplined people became a nuisance to others, to the community, and to the Church. They were not acting in a way that glorified God, but rather they were acting in ways that embarrassed the Church. Paul demanded (v.6) the Thessalonians to put a stop to it, but how?

“Keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life...” (v.6) What does it mean to keep away from these people? Since these unruly Christians did not reflect well on Christ, Paul told the Thessalonians not to associate with them. Hanging around them would be a negative influence on their walk with God and associating with them might appear to condone their behavior.

“Follow our example,” Paul wrote, “because we did not act in an undisciplined manner...” (v.7) While Paul was with the Thessalonians, he worked night and day to earn a living, so that he would not be a burden to anyone, having to ask for food or shelter. He paid his own way and was not dependent on anyone’s charity (v.8), even though he could’ve asked for these things (v.9). As an Apostle of Christ, Paul could’ve used his authority in the Church and demanded payment or sustenance, but he didn’t. Instead, Paul wanted to be an example for people to follow.

Next, Paul laid down an important principle. “If anyone is not willing to work,” he said, “then he is not to eat...” (v.10). Notice that he connected working with eating, labor with survival. He advocated for independence not dependence. In other words, Paul condemned laziness.

God created us to work, just like Him. He worked to create the heavens and the earth (*Gen. 1:1; 2:2*). Since we are made in His image, we are wired to work. When we work, we reflect God’s image, God’s character, and bring Him glory. God put Adam and Eve in the garden to work (*Gen. 2:15*). The garden had everything in it for their survival, but they had to work in order to sustain themselves. There were no freebies or handouts.

Work is a blessing to us, a gift from God. It is not a curse of sin. Work is a way to glorify the Lord and meet our own needs. We were created to work, to produce, to prosper, and therefore to resist work is to rebel against God’s established order. Laziness is a sin. It is to refuse to do what God has created us to do. God’s people should be producers, not consumers, independent not dependent, providing for others rather than being provided for. Paul wrote, “Work in quiet fashion and eat your own bread...” (v.12).

Finally, Paul added, “Do not grow weary of doing good...” (v.13). Don’t allow lazy people to discourage you. You are doing what God has asked and you will be rewarded. Persevere. Keep going. However, “do not associate with people like that, so that they will be put to shame...” (v.14). Such people must be reprimanded or disciplined, not as an enemy but as a brother, not out of hate or spite but because we love and care for them. “Do not regard them as enemies but admonish them like brothers” (v.15). We discipline others for their own good. This lifestyle is destructive for the unruly person, for the Church, and for the effectiveness of the Gospel. We must nip it in the bud.

¹⁶ “Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all! ¹⁷I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. ¹⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”

Grace and Peace

Dealing with Difficulty

Leading Idea

God does not remove us from difficult circumstances but gives us peace in the midst of them.

We have come to the close of Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, a letter that has addressed several turbulent topics – persecution, the Day of the Lord, the apostasy, the man of lawlessness, the unruly or undisciplined church members, and more. The Apostle was doing his best to answer their questions and to confront a potentially destructive problem in their church. His goals were to quiet their minds, affirm their faith, and assuage their fears. To accomplish these tasks, Paul ended his letter by reminding the Thessalonians of the source, the means, and the effects of peace.

First, Paul identifies the source of peace. “Now,” he wrote, “may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance” (v.16). God Himself is our source of peace. While many Christians look for peace in a place, a vice, a habit, a hobby, a peer, a spouse, or something else, the true source is the person of Jesus Christ. “Peace I leave with you,” He said. “My peace I give to you, not as the world gives..., so let not your heart be troubled” (*John 14:27*).

Once we realize that God is our source of peace, then we forsake looking for peace in any other means. God is constant and consistent, unchanging and unmoved. He is the same yesterday and today and forever. How do we tap into this peace of God? That’s the amazing part! We don’t have to tap into it, because His peace is in us. Those who have surrendered their lives to Christ have His Spirit dwelling in them. “Do you not know that you are a temple of God,” Paul wrote, “and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (*1 Cor. 3:16*). The Spirit of God resides in our hearts and minds; therefore, His peace is always in us and with us. All we have to do is abide in Him, meaning “be still and know that He is God” (*Psalms 46:10*). Cease striving. Stop being anxious. Trust in the Lord and find our rest.

With God’s Spirit comes God’s grace. We already have all the grace we need, and it is God’s grace that enables us to endure difficulties without losing our minds (v.18). When Paul experienced turmoil in his life, he prayed that God would remove those obstacles from his path and give him peace. God’s response to Paul is well-known to us all. God gave Paul peace, not by removing the circumstances from Paul’s life but by giving him the grace to endure them in peace. “My grace is sufficient for you,” the Lord told Paul, “for power is perfected in weakness” (*2 Cor. 12:9*).

The world’s idea of peace is to have a pleasant flight, a smooth road, or an enjoyable experience. Turmoil, stress, persecution, trials, and tribulations do not enter into the equation. But, with God’s Spirit indwelling us, we can be at peace at all times, despite what circumstances we are experiencing. The result is “a peace which passes all understanding,” Paul says (*Phil. 4:5, 6*). As we lift our prayers to God, His peace will “guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

To add this phrase at the close of his letter, Paul was reminding the Thessalonians that no matter what they were facing – persecution, anxiety over the Lord’s return, or troublesome church members – they could experience God’s peace. Their journey did not have to be bump-free in order to experience peace, for the God of peace was right beside them (actually within them) as they walked.

Finally, Paul added a strange close to the letter. “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is a distinguishing mark in every letter. This is the way I write” (v.17). For some unknown reason (perhaps a physical ailment or disability, such as poor eyesight), Paul evidently relied upon others to write his letters (see *Rom. 16:22*). Though the words were Paul’s words, he did not write them himself but used a secretary of sorts to pen them. Therefore, at the end of a letter, to validate the words, Paul added his signature, so that churches would know for sure that they were from Paul and not a pretender (see also *1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18*).