

2 Thessalonians

- 1. Who was the writer? When was this book written?** Just as the first letter to the Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians was also written by Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy. This letter was written to "the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This letter also looks like it was written from Corinth only months after 1 Thessalonians was written about A.D. 51. It was probably written after Paul received further information about the church in Thessalonica from Silas and Timothy upon their return from delivering the first letter.
- 2. What seems to be the motivation for this second letter?** This second letter deals with much of the same information as the first letter. However, there are a couple of extra points of emphasis. It seems that some in Thessalonica were so focused on the imminent return of Christ that they were neglecting to do any physical work. There is certainly strong encouragement within this book for Christians to pull their own load -- see 3:6-15. For the church to function effectively, it is imperative that each individual make a commitment to work with our own hands. We all need to make a decision to be givers, not takers.
- 3. How were the Thessalonian Christians handling the persecutions that were present in their day? What can we learn from this?** It appears that after Paul was run out of Thessalonica as recorded in Acts 17, the Jewish opposition turned toward those who had become Christians. This is evidenced first by the immediate attack upon Jason and other brethren in the search for Paul -- see Acts 17:5-9. This persecution did not let up, as Paul refers to these persecutions in his first letter to the Thessalonians (2:14-16) and begins this second letter also referring to the suffering that they were enduring (1:4-6). Paul was appreciative for the Thessalonian brethren for their response to this persecution. Instead of caving under the pressure, these Christians were growing in both faith and in love toward each other -- 1:3. Paul was proud of them because of their perseverance and faith in the midst of these trials -- 1:4.

We can learn how to respond appropriately as the pressure is turned up on us. The fiery furnace either makes you or breaks you. In the fiery struggles of persecution, the dross is burned off and the pure of heart is all that is left. Those who are in Christ from impure motives are exposed, and the weak in faith are shown to be the rocky soil whose fruit ends up withering away after being scorched by the wind. However, those who grow strong in faith are proven as good soil that bears fruit with perseverance. Each of us must honestly ask ourselves what we are willing to endure for the cause of Christ. Can we withstand the harsh reality of jail cells, political prison camps, shame of family members, betrayal of former brethren, poverty, or any form of physical torture that can be dreamed up? Every one of us is either preparing to be spiritual victors in these trying times, or by lack of preparation we are setting ourselves up for failure. Do you want to win? Then get growing in faith!

- 4. What two groups of people will be punished at Christ's return?** One of the most common questions that arises in Bible studies concerning salvation is some variation of: "What happens to people who don't know what God says about salvation?". Thankfully God has answered this question within the Scriptures. Even though it is never comfortable to think about those who will spend eternity in hell, it is essential that everyone come face to face with this reality. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 paints a very clear picture of the result for those who don't submit to God's will. Verse 8 specifically mentions two groups of people whom Christ will punish at His return. The first group mentioned is "those who do not know God." How can it be fair for God to judge those who don't know Him? First of all, the Scriptures are clear that God is a righteous judge -- see Psalm 9:8, Psalm 98:9, Romans 3:4-6. Therefore, the conclusion that we can draw is that each individual has the responsibility to seek out God -- Deuteronomy 4:29, Isaiah 55:6. God is not wishing for any to perish (2 Peter 3:9), He has not left Himself without witness (Acts 14:16-17), and He has furnished, through the resurrection of Christ, proof to all men of the coming judgment (Acts 17:30-31). Every adult is without excuse (Romans 2:19) and the whole world is accountable before God (Romans 3:19).

Another group that faces eternal punishment is "those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." The gospel means "good news." It is important to note that the "good news" must be obeyed. It isn't enough to hear the gospel, but we must also "heed the glad tidings" -- see Romans 10:16. True faith is evidenced by obedience; where there is no obedience, there is no real faith. All of those who refuse to be obedient in the waters of immersion are destined to burn forever regardless of their professed faith. As Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

The harsh reality of eternal punishment for the lost should motivate us to speak the word that all may have the opportunity to "know God" and to "obey the gospel."

- 5. Who is the "man of lawlessness" spoken of in chapter 2?** There are a couple of hints in this passage that point to the "man of lawlessness" as the false religion of Catholicism. Notice, first of all, that the revelation of this "man of lawlessness" is associated with what the Holy Spirit calls the "apostasy" -- see 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The apostasy is a defection or falling away from the truth. While the Catholic church claims to be the first church of Christ, in reality they are the first apostate church. The gnosticism of the latter first century has gradually morphed into the full-blown heresy of modern-day Catholicism.

A second point that directs us to Catholicism is in verse 4 of this same chapter. The "man of lawlessness" exalts himself above every object of worship and "takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." This is an exact description of the position of the papacy. The word "Pope" means "Papa," and in the Catholic church, he represents the "Holy Father." Jesus was clear that the title "Father" is to be reserved for God alone -- see Matthew 23:9. According to the Scripture, Jesus is the head of the Church (the real temple), but in Catholicism, the Pope is the head of the church. For a

good overview of all the ways that the Catholic church fits this passage, listen to the 2010 Peaks message preached by Steve Compton.

- 6. What kind of people end up being deceived?** Read 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. The people who are deceived are those who do "not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." Truth has a tremendous value -- it is rarer than silver or gold or any other earthly commodity. Those who aren't willing to sell everything in order to attain it will at some juncture fall for a lie. The real cause for discarding the truth is fully disclosed in verse 12 -- it comes because people "took pleasure in wickedness." As Christians, we need to make a commitment to "buy truth, and do not sell it ..." (Proverbs 23:23). We need to be completely honest before God, and choose to be true disciples of Jesus so that we may know the truth and be set free by it -- see John 8:31-32.
- 7. What is the Christian's responsibility in reference to physical work?** The third chapter of 2 Thessalonians drives home the responsibility of every able-bodied individual to work hard. Paul and his companions were a great example as they worked hard, and did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it. While at Thessalonica, they had given an order: "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat." If necessity is the mother of invention, then starvation is the father of motivation -- see Proverbs 16:26. Everyone is "to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread." A strong work ethic is one of the first habits that we need to acquire in developing Christ-like character.
- 8. In what ways is the term "faith" used in this letter?** The word "faith" is used 5 times in this letter, and "faithful" is used once. 1:3 speaks of the faith of the Thessalonians being "greatly enlarged." Is this something that others would say about your faith? In 1:4, Paul was proud of the faith that the Thessalonians displayed in the midst of persecutions and afflictions. 1:11 talks about the "work of faith with power." Many times people attempt to disassociate faith from works. However, consistently throughout the Scriptures, we see that faith works. 2:13 mentions that our salvation comes through "sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth." Faith isn't a strong belief in whatever you choose, rather, faith is an absolute conviction about the truth. 3:2 reminds us that "not all have faith." We must remember that there is a war, and we have enemies -- these enemies are the unfaithful among the world. 3:3 encourages us that in the midst of an unfaithful world, the Lord is always faithful. How great it is to know that we can count on the Lord in all things!
- 9. How is the term "good" used in this letter?** The term "good" is used 3 times in this letter, and "goodness" is used once. In 1:11 Paul and his companions prayed that God would fulfill every desire for goodness. What are our desires? Is it for goodness for everyone and everywhere? 2:16 speaks of God giving us "eternal comfort and good hope by grace." Our hope isn't fixed on this world, but is a good hope that is eternal. This prayer goes on in 2:17 to ask that God would "comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. Goodness should shine through in both our speech and actions. 3:13 reminds us that we can't "grow weary of doing good." Doing good can be tiring, so we need to rely on the Spirit of holiness to strengthen us to keep doing good until the end.

10. What other important points were covered in 2 Thessalonians? There are many great points in this book, but here are a few that come to my mind.

- The love of each one toward one another grows even greater -- 1:4
- While the unrighteous are punished, Christ is glorified in His saints on that day -- 1:10
- The means of God's calling is through the gospel -- 2:14
- We should pray that the word of God spread rapidly -- 3:1
- The Lord directs our hearts into the love and God and into the steadfastness of Christ -- 3:5
- The Lord of peace can give us peace in every circumstance -- 3:16