

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Introduction to the Book of 2 Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 1:1-5)

Did Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians accomplish all he intended?

What worked?

- Paul had praised the Thessalonians' growth in faith, hope, and love -- and the Thessalonians did seem to hear this (although they may not have completely accepted it).
- Paul had defended his own ministry and his authority as an apostle, and he did not need to repeat that in this second letter.

What did not work?

- There were still misunderstandings about the Second Coming of Christ and its relationship to Church-age believers today. There was confusion between their present sufferings and the future wrath of God that would be poured out on the world.
- There was still a problem with a group of people who were unwilling to earn their own livelihood, but instead they desired to have the church support them.

When was this second letter written?

- It appears to have been written very soon after the first letter to the Thessalonians, and from the same place (Corinth). Paul, Silas, and Timothy are together for the writing of both letters (see 1 Th 1:1 and 2 Th 1:1), and Corinth is the only place where they were known to be together during this time.
- Acts 18 records Paul's time in Corinth, and starting in Acts 18:12 we see Paul brought before the Roman officials by a group of wicked men. The second letter to the Thessalonians must have been written at about this time because in 2 Thess 3:2 Paul asks for prayer to be delivered from these unreasonable and wicked men.
- Paul certainly wrote Second Thessalonians before he himself visited there again. Acts 20 records Paul's next visit to Thessalonica, so his second letter must have been written well before this time.

What had happened between these two letters to the Thessalonians?

1. The persecution of the believers in Thessalonica had grown more intense, and it was bringing people to the point of despair. They needed to be encouraged (2 Th 1)
2. A letter (supposedly from Paul) as well as false teaching from others claimed that the Tribulation had already come. This was inferred from the intensity of their present suffering (2 Th 2:2). They needed to be instructed (2 Th 2).
3. A specific group of unruly believers in the church were still refusing to earn their normal livelihood, and this tendency had increased since Paul's first letter (2 Th 3:10-11). They needed to be corrected (2 Th 3).

Paul's opening address (2 Thess. 1:1-2)

- As in 1 Th 1:1, Paul writes to the *organized church* in Thessalonica -- the ones in Christ.
- Paul's language shows an even more intimate relationship to God than in the first letter. He is not just God *the* Father, but our Father.
- Even though the persecution has grown stronger in Thessalonica, Paul still sends them the grace and peace of God. Grace provides the divine enablement to do God's will, while peace provides assurance and serenity even in

the most terrible circumstances.

- In this second letter, Paul adds that this grace & peace are from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This indicates the specific source of these gifts. The ability to deal with whatever life brings to us does not come from within ourselves, but from God Himself.
- Once again we see that Jesus Christ is placed on an equal plane of deity with God the Father. This reinforces the deity of Christ.

Paul's obligation to give thanks to God for them (2 Thess. 1:3)

- In his first letter, Paul had been very enthusiastic with his praise. It may be that after reading the first letter the Thessalonians had modestly denied being worthy of such praise. So here Paul insists that his praise was genuine, and that he was in fact obligated to give thanks for them -- it was *only fitting* -- it was no more than they deserved.
- Why was Paul obligated? *Because* there was good reason:
 1. Their faith was making amazing progress (*huperauxano* = enlarged above and beyond what is normal; growing exceedingly).
 2. Their love for each other was growing to fulfillment (*pleonadzo* = increased more fully; made full).
- Paul's previous prayer had been answered! (1 Th 3:12) He was duty-bound to thank God for all He had accomplished.
- Their love was not just a generalized quality, but it was the love of each and every individual that was increasing.

Paul speaks proudly about them to others (2 Thess. 1:4)

- Therefore = the *result* of their growing faith and love was that Paul and his companions could encourage other churches with the example provided by the Thessalonians. To *speak proudly* (glory, rejoice, exalt) is the same word used at the end of 1 Th 2:19 (exaltation).
- What was Paul saying about them?
 1. They showed great perseverance (*hupomene* = "abiding under").
 2. They held tightly to their faith. Believers reveal their faith in God through their *faithfulness* in life. In the midst of severe oppression they did not renounce their faith.
- Their perseverance & faith were especially noteworthy because they were demonstrated in the midst of all kinds of persecutions (*diogmos* = to chase, pursue, or hunt down) and afflictions (*thlipsis* = to be pressed into a narrow place; oppression; see 1 Th 3:3-4). The Thessalonians were continually enduring (*anechomai* = to bear up, suffer) -- the trials did not relent.

Worthiness for the "Kingdom of God" (2 Thess. 1:5)

- It looked to the Thessalonians like the tribulation they were experiencing did not make sense in light of the righteous judgment of God. Does God let the righteous suffer without punishing their persecutors? Is there *unrighteousness* in God for allowing His children to suffer?
- Something about the Thessalonians was a plain indication (*endeigma* = indicator, evidence, confirmed proof) that God does indeed judge righteously. The indicator was not the trials themselves, but their response to the trials. Their perseverance and faith provided a solid proof that God was at work within them, enabling them to behave in ways that were opposite to their own natural desires.
- "Kingdom of God" is a rare phrase in Paul's writings. It does not refer to heaven or to salvation in general -- the Church is not the "kingdom of God." It refers to the millennial kingdom when Christ will reign on earth after the Tribulation period.
- The Thessalonian believers are considered worthy of the kingdom of God because they have kept their faith in Christ, even when faced with severe opposition. The verb considered worthy (*kataxioo*) does not mean to *make* one worthy, but to *declare* one is worthy. This verb is an aorist passive infinitive = "to have been declared worthy at a specific point in time." It is unfortunate that many English Bibles have translated this as if it were a future tense. They have already been declared worthy, but in a future sense at the time the millennial kingdom begins they certainly "will be" shown to have been worthy.
- Their worthiness to participate in the kingdom of God was established well before persecution came upon them -- it was established when they placed their faith and trust in what Christ did on their behalf by dying on the cross.

There is no human effort involved in meriting the kingdom of God.

- These believers had outwardly confirmed the inward truth that they indeed are Church-age saints who will eventually rule with Christ during His 1000-year kingdom on earth (see 1 Th 2:12 and 2 Tim 2:12). Their response to life's trials definitely confirmed that they already had a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The phrase for which does not mean "in order to *gain* the kingdom" but "in the *name* or *interest* of the kingdom" -- their suffering was not in order to gain more merit before God. Their suffering was because they had already been declared worthy of the kingdom. You are persecuted because you are a Christian.
- This entire discussion also implies that there will be a righteous judgment in the future during which the Thessalonians' persecutors will be punished (see 2 Th 1:6-10).

Points of Application:

- We need to remember that God's grace & peace are all we need in order to make it through the trials of life, and that God Himself is the source of these gifts.
- We can also follow the example of the Thessalonians by increasing and growing in faith and self-sacrificing love. Remember that what we do as believers really does matter -- who knows who might be watching our example. Would those who are watching us be motivated to grow in their faith and love, or not? Remember that God never wastes an experience in our lives, but He will use everything to help us grow to maturity in Christ.
- We need to remember what our final destination is -- we are destined to participate in the kingdom of God. Especially during times of suffering, we can take comfort in the fact that this world is not all there is. Jesus is coming for us very soon!

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Our primary purpose is to uphold the truths of the Word of God.

I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

Our primary responsibility is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12)