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TRUST GOD AND FEEL SAFE

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I OVERVIEW OF II THESSALONIANS

PURPOSE: This follow up epistle was inspired to clear up the confusion about the Second Coming of Christ. In this epistle, Paul indicates various events that must precede the Second Coming of Christ.

AUTHOR: The apostle Paul.

TO WHOM WRITTEN: The young church at Thessalonica and all believers everywhere.

DATE WRITTEN: About 51 or 52 A.D. from Corinth. It was written a few months after I Thessalonians.

SETTING: Many in the church were confused about the timing of Christ's return. Because of mounting persecution, the Church at Thessalonica thought that the day of the Lord must be imminent, and they interpreted Paul's first letter to say that the Second Coming would be at any moment. In light of this misunderstanding, many persisted in being lazy and disorderly with the excuse of waiting for Christ's return.

KEY PEOPLE: Paul, Silas and Timothy

BLUEPRINT:

- **The bright hope of Christ's return (1:1-2:17)**
- Living in the light of Christ's return (3:1-18)

MEGATHEMES:

Persecution	Paul encouraged the church to have patience in spite of troubles and hardships. God will bring victory to His faithful followers and judge those who persecute them.
Christ's Return	Since Paul had said that the Lord would come at any moment some of the Thessalonian believers had stopped work in order to wait for Christ.
Great Rebellion	Before Christ's return, there will be a great rebellion against God led by the man of the rebellion (a.k.a. the Antichrist). God will remove all restraints on evil before He brings judgment on the rebels. The Antichrist will attempt to deceive many.
Persistence	Because church members had quit working and become disorderly and disobedient, Paul chastened them for their laziness. He called them to show courage and true Christian conduct.

II INTRODUCTION

It may have only been a matter of weeks after completing I Thessalonians that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write II Thessalonians. In the first letter, Paul dealt with two primary issues, which he returned to in this letter. These were matters related to the **Second Coming of Jesus Christ and concerns about idlers that had stopped working**. He emphasized that they could continue to **trust God** to judge their persecutors in His own time. No matter what the outward circumstances may have been God is always sovereign.

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III

SCRIPTURE

WHAT IS GOING ON? (1:1-4)

II Thessalonians 1 shows the godly character of a persecuted church as Paul offers encouragement to the church at Thessalonica. Paul himself founded the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9). He was only in the city a short time because he was forced out by enemies of the gospel. But the church of the Thessalonians left behind was alive and active. Paul's deep concern for this young church, which he had to suddenly leave, prompted this letter, following after the letter of I Thessalonians.

(1-2): A greeting from Paul and his associates: Paul's greeting in his second epistle to the church at Thessalonica is very similar to his first letter with two changes: (1) God the Father has become God **our** Father; and, (2) added words of "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" after grace and peace.

Morris cites Bicknell: "The Greek makes it plain that the Father and Christ are one source. It is remarkable that even at this early date the Son is placed side by side with the Father as the fount of divine grace, without any need of comment."

Paul prayed that the believers would continue to experience God's grace (i.e., His lavish goodness and active love) and God's peace (i.e., wholeness, soundness and well-being under God's rule).

(3-4): Paul's thanks for and boasts about the Thessalonians: Paul gave thanks for the believers' faith and love, but did not mention hope, which he addressed with the other two attributes, in the first letter. This didn't mean that Paul thought that their hope had diminished. What he did was to refer to the two qualities that produce and express hope (**I Corinthians 13:13**): (1) faith (vertical); and, (2) love (horizontal).

The keys to surviving persecution and trials are endurance and faithfulness. This is why Paul focused on the qualities of perseverance and faith in the continual persecutions and trials they were enduring. Perseverance and faithfulness describes an active quality of standing up under pressure, not a victim's attitude of passive endurance. They were able to hold onto their faith under all active circumstances and stresses. (**Galatians 6:9; Romans 5:4; James 1:4; Galatians 5:23**). **Because of these attributes, they experienced rapid spiritual growth beyond expectations.**

Spurgeon explained how to get growing and strong faith: "By that means you are to grow. This is so with faith. Do all you can, and then do a little more; and when you can do that, then do a little more than you can. Always have something in hand that is greater than your present capacity. Grow up to it, and when you have grown up to it, grow more."

WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN? (1:5-10)

Focusing on the constant persecutions and trials in the previous verse, Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to turn his thoughts to God's righteous judgment. Since God is just, He must punish (i.e., unleash His wrath) on sin (John 3:36). Paul assured the Believers that God's righteous judgment would lead Him to punish the wicked and reward the faithful. The faithful would escape punishment because God's wrath was expiated by Jesus' propitiatory sacrifice (I John 2:1-2).

(5): Persecution and tribulation of the Thessalonians set the righteousness of God on display: The evidence that Paul was referring to was the **perseverance and faith**, which counted them worthy of the Kingdom of God. It should be noted that being "counted worthy" is not the same as being made worthy or becoming worthy.

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They were saved (i.e., became worthy) by their faith (**Ephesians 2:8-10**), yet their endurance revealed the genuine quality of their commitment (i.e., seed in fertile soil). **You will endure suffering for the Kingdom only if you belong to the Kingdom.** Persecution and opposition are inevitable for Christ's followers. Suffering is just one of God's instruments of discipline to shape us into all He wants us to be as citizens of His Kingdom and to increase our dependency on Him for everything (**James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-4**).

We usually think that God is absent when we suffer, and that our suffering calls God's righteous judgment into question. Paul took the exact opposite position and insisted that their suffering was evidence of the righteous judgment of God. Where suffering is coupled with righteous endurance, God's work is done. The fires of persecution and tribulation were like the purifying fires of a refiner, burning away the dross from the gold, bringing forth a pure, precious metal.

(6): God is just ensures that God will act in harmony with His Character: God cannot be just and do right if He gave both good and evil the same rewards. Therefore, this judgment has two aspects: (1) Positive: Believers are judged worthy of His Kingdom; and, (2) Negative: Unrepentant persecutors would be repaid (i.e., full and due recompense) for their persecution of the Thessalonian church.

Many people question the righteousness of God's judgment. They believe that God's love and His judgment contradict each other. But God's judgment is based on the great spiritual principle that it is a righteous thing with God to repay those who do evil. Since God is righteous, He will repay all evil, and it will all be judged and accounted for either at the cross or in hell.

However, this assurance doesn't lessen the pain of suffering, but it reassures us that God has established a moral Universe in which all kinds of immorality will be judged. In fact, the nature of God's Creation is so determined that if you sin, pain will be ultimately inflicted on you. The only independent variable is time (**Galatians 6:7-9**). We can gain strength to endure trials and harsh treatment through contemplating the future rest we have with the Lord (**Hebrews 4:9**).

(7): God's judgment sometimes may be delayed: In some instances, God's judgment on evildoers takes place in their lifetimes, as sin takes a toll on human life. However, in its **fullest sense**, God's righteous judgment awaits the end time (i.e., the Great White Throne Judgment of **Revelation 20:11-14**). **II Thessalonians** was written 43 years before the Book of **Revelation** and provided a preview (at that time) about Jesus Second Coming in blazing fire with His powerful angels.

The Thessalonian Christians were persecuted and had tribulation; and God used it for His glory. But the time of persecution would not last. A day of rest is promised for every believer.

(8-10): The coming judgment for both the persecuted and their persecutors: At the Second Coming, Christ Jesus will come to administer even-handed justice that rewards righteousness and punishes wickedness. At this particular time, the people at risk were the Romans and the non-Messianic Jews, the prime opponents of the 1st Century Church.

It isn't the fire that makes hell what it is. In the fiery furnace, the three Jewish young men were completely comfortable, as long as the Lord was with them in the fire (Daniel 3). What truly characterizes hell is that there, people are from the presence of the Lord, in the sense of being apart from anything good or blessed in God's presence. Nothing must be said more about its horrors, other than hell will be completely devoid of God and every aspect of His character, except one: His unrelenting holy justice.

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The punishment of everlasting destruction, or the Lake of Fire (**Revelation 20:14**) is diametrically opposite to eternal life. It is an eternal separation from God. Those who do not accept God's free love gift will experience ultimate rejection by Him at that Great White Throne Judgment. This is their punishment (see **Matthew 25:41**), while the Believers will be with the Lord forever (**I Thessalonians 4:17**). This is pretty sobering for those who oppose the truth of God and His ways. God is pretty clear that they are not engaging in some inconsequential activity.

We must not be moved from the idea that the punishment of the wicked is everlasting. As the blessings of heaven are eternal, the penalty of hell is also eternal. "The perpetual duration of this death is proved from the fact that its opposite is the glory of Christ. This is eternal and has no end." (Calvin)

II Thessalonians 3-10 are actually one long Greek sentence. Paul concludes this sentence by shifting from the negative purpose of the Lord's return (i.e., judgment) to the positive purpose (i.e., blessing). This speaks of the completion of salvation in which Christ's indwelling presence will no longer be limited or partially hidden (**I Corinthians 13:12**) by our human nature. The Christ, who is in all Believers, will finally shine forth in unhindered and undiminished fullness and majesty.

WHAT COULD HAPPEN? (1:11-12)

(11): Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians: Paul's constant prayer for the church at Thessalonica was twofold: (1) Being counted worthy of His calling (**I Thessalonians 1:12**); and, (2) To will and to act according to His good purpose (**Philippians 2:13**). To achieve both of these requires the power of the indwelt Holy Spirit, since human power is insufficient to bring about the good purposes and godly acts. They had to be totally dependent on His Power (**John 1:12; Philippians 4:13**).

Paul is exhorting the Thessalonians to become like Christ (**Romans 8:29**) and glorify Jesus by taking on His character and living worthy of His call. We accomplish this:

- ❖ When we fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness, living lives touched by His goodness, and displaying His goodness.
- ❖ When we fulfill the work of faith with power, believing on Jesus and seeing His work done all around us by faith.
- ❖ When the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is glorified in us. This means more than the name of our Lord Jesus as a word, but also as a representation of His character.
- ❖ When we are glorified in Him, when He alone is our source of glory and exaltation, and who we are in Jesus is more important than who we are in anything else.

Paul emphasized the Father and the Son as the sources of grace that transforms believers in the sanctification experience, continues to shape them in Christ's likeness (Ephesians 4:13), makes them effective in service, and sustains them in the face of opposition. Grace begins and fuels the entire Christian journey from the moment of salvation to the entrance in God's immediate presence.