

2 Thessalonians 1

Introduction

Paul went to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey after leaving Philippi. It was a very great city, with a famous harbour, a great dockyard, and a population of 200,000. It was on a very important road linking Rome with the east, so there was much trade and great wealth. It was a very strategic place to capture for the Gospel.

Paul preached in the synagogue for three Sabbaths, and had tremendous success, so much so that the Jews were enraged, and Paul had to be smuggled out to Berea. So Paul's time in Thessalonica was only brief. Timothy eventually met up with Paul in Athens bringing news of the church at Thessalonica. He brought good news of spiritual growth and development. However the people had given up work because they thought the second coming was imminent.

In Paul's first letter, He told them to get on with their work, and reassured them about relatives who died before the second coming. He also dealt with rebelliousness against the leaders, the ever-present danger of immorality, and addressed those who criticised him for being in the ministry for the wrong reasons. There was division in the church because some regarded Paul as a dictator.

2 Thessalonians was written within a few weeks of 1 Thessalonians. It was written to clear up another misconception about the second coming. In the first letter Paul had described the Lord's return as being like a thief coming in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2), and as a result some men were just watching and waiting. How easily preachers are misunderstood when certain phrases are taken out of context. So Paul gives an explanation of the signs which have to come first. He tries to get them to have balance and proportion in their lives. Paul also finds it necessary to repeat much good advice earlier given about Christian behaviour. But the main aim of the letter is to calm their hysteria and make them wait, but not in excited idleness but in patient attendance to their day's work.

Today going to look at outline of entire chapter, and later going to look closely at some individual verses.

Greeting (v1,2)

Paul opens in the usual way, following the practice of ancient letter writing, with a greeting from the writer to the reader. **Grace and peace to you from the God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** Grace always precedes peace, as the engine always precedes the carriages.

Thanksgiving (v3-5)

All the wisdom of a wise leader is in this opening passage. He highlights virtues and achievements in such a way that those despondent Christians would pick their heads up and hold them high, thinking, "Well, if Paul thinks that of us, we'll make a fight of

it yet.” Therefore he stresses that their faith is growing, and their love for one another is increasing. Paul boasts of them in other churches, commending their steadfastness and faith in the midst of persecution. In His righteous judgement, God uses these tribulations to bring His people to perfection.

So despite their faults, which were very real, this was a church with marks of vitality. Their faith was surer every day. Although he has stern words to come later, Paul’s opening words are words of encouragement.

Divine judgement (v6-10)

God’s recompense on those persecuting them is coming. It will happen at the revelation of Christ from heaven – with mighty angels, in flaming fire. He will bring vengeance on those not knowing God or obeying the Gospel. They are going to suffer eternal destruction, exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might.

This is one of the clearest teachings about the punishment of sin. Some argue that these words are not Christian, and have been added by a Jewish interpolator. But they are in keeping with the Christian message. Sin cannot go unpunished. Retribution for persecutors and rest for His people is an important aspect of the Lord’s Return.

This is an awe-inspiring and solemn picture. It will be a terrible day for those who have refused God’s claims and spurned the revelation of Him in the Gospel. N.B. “Destruction” (v9) is a good translation – it implies complete ruin, as opposed to annihilation. It means the loss of all that makes life worth living. The opposite of eternal life. The real sting is being separated from fellowship with the Lord and His glory. There is a finality in the lot of the unrepentant. “Infinite and irreparable loss at the Last Advent. They pass into a night on which no morning dawns” (J.Denney).

Then in v10 is an interesting picture of the Second Coming. **On the day He comes to be glorified in His holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed.** The A.V. uses “admire” in its old usage – it will be a breath-taking wonder. Saints will be like a mirror reflecting the glory of the Lord. Also we shall be His glory, just as a teacher’s glory in his scholars, and a parent’s glory is their children. So the believer’s glory is Christ, and Christ’s glory is the believer.

Paul’s prayer (v11-12)

Paul prays that they will all be worthy of God’s call, and fulfil every good purpose and work of faith by His power. The result will be that Christ is glorified in them. His works of power in them will bring Him glory. So there will be glory in the Second Coming for Christ, and also now before that day.

All this is possible because of God’s grace. It is not in the power of the Thessalonians to do this. “Grace” is a rich word. God’s favour to the unworthy. Available through the work of Christ, and His gifts which are available.