

Bible Study Notes

(A basic transcription with modifications for style and clarity)

2 THESSALONIANS 1:1 - 3:18

Brian Orchard, March 4, 2017

With this study we want to continue to glean understanding from Paul's letters that he wrote to the Church in Thessalonica. We spent a good deal of time going through the first letter. Many of the things that are contained therein are built on, as far as the second letter is concerned. The second letter was written a short time after the first and as we look at the content you can probably figure out why he needed to write again so soon, because there had been a reaction to some of the things that he had built into his first letter. Now, these letters were written probably 50 and 51 AD, somewhere in that order - a very short period of time between the two of them.

Paul wanted to encourage, which he did with both of the letters. There's some strong encouragement within both of these letters for the members. However, he was also teaching. He wanted to make sure that the Church was growing in understanding of certain things. He was also correcting - gently correcting - some of the things that needed to be corrected within the body there, within the congregation.

We need to remember that underneath, or underlying all of this was the fact that this Church in Thessalonica existed in an extremely pagan culture. It was thoroughly rooted in pagan temple worship, and some of that we saw in the first letter with the example of sexual immorality. The sexual immorality there had its roots in the temple worship itself. So it gave a degree of 'credibility,' if I could use that word, to the sexual practices that were regarded as somewhat normal. Paul had to correct that and have the people look deeply at some of these things.

In that first letter, Paul encouraged them to keep their eye on the goal. And certainly, through scripture we are encouraged to do the same thing. The goal that he emphasized was the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection that accompanies Christ's return.

Now, a short while later, Paul had to return to that topic because of some of the conjecture and some of the understanding that had developed; some wrong teaching had developed. He had to subtly correct the source of that wrong teaching, which he does. As an introduction to 2 Thessalonians, I would like to read a parable because I think it serves as a basis to see where Paul is coming from with some of the things that

he says. This parable is in Matthew the 13th chapter beginning in verse 24. We'll just pick up the parable in verse 24.

Matthew 13:24 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; (We have no problems in recognizing exactly what is being referred to here.)

25 but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.

26 But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.

My understanding is that the two plants, a wheat plant and a tare plant look reasonably similar in their early growing stages. It's not until the fruit appears (in this sense, the ears of grain that appear on the wheat) that you can identify the difference, because the tare can't put forth that head of wheat. It is then you see the difference between these two plants.

27 So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?'

28 He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?'

29 But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.

This was probably an astonishing thing for Christ to say. No, let the wheat and the tares grow together; don't address them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.""

This, of course, as a parable, has broad teaching for the Church at any time, so does the letter of 2 Thessalonians have application in our lives. Otherwise it wouldn't be here canonized in the word of God. However, very often (and I'm thinking back to Paul's time, of course, we can make an equation with this) Paul couldn't be everywhere all at once. He had to leave and visit congregations, establish congregations or go and encourage a congregation then move on, on a circuit. Go to another congregation and leave that congregation. In some cases there were good, strong, local ministers to take care of the flock in Paul's absence. But in some cases, that wasn't so. So then, Paul and the others really found truth in this parable, with what they had to deal with from time to time within the Church; finding that tares had popped up, producing false teaching and bothering – troubling - the members.

Now, how did the false teachings and teachers operate? Well, we have to remember that it was a powerful cultural environment that the Church found itself in, as it is today. I'm thinking particularly of Thessalonica. Until they heard and responded to the gospel message, that environment was reality; that was the reality of life to them! Yet, just in responding to the gospel message, it's difficult to just shrug some of that off. It remains, as you well know. We don't want it to. We'd like to completely get rid of all vestiges of the cultural environment in which we have lived until God calls us and draws us to His truth. That's easier said than done.

Add to this the fact - and this is based on some fairly modern experience as well as the fact of scripture - that there are always people who want recognition through being seen as intellectuals within the Church. Gnostic teaching, which is certainly very strong here at this point in time, was an intellectually based teaching. Those who understood it and embraced it were superior, in intellect and knowledge, to others. There are always people that want recognition in such manner. We should not be surprised that this does happen. Let's go to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 and begin in verse 1. We have Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, the three major players, - ministerial-wise - in the Church at that time. All three had a strong influence within the Church there.

2 Thessalonians 1:1 Greeting Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A fairly typical greeting from Paul in the beginning of the letter. He says, and it gets quite encouraging and quite understanding - that there is good growth amongst them. He says:

3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,

4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,

This is a similar thought that he expressed in his first letter, and that would have been very encouraging to these. Remember, we're talking about 50, 51 AD here. It's a fairly fledgling group in that sense, in terms of the length of the church's existence. Right here he makes an early reference to persecutions and tribulations that they endure. So there is a window into some of the things that may have been going on within that congregation. There was good growth, good development, but there were still problems. There were persecutions and trials; tribulations which they had to endure.

5 which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;

That's an interesting concept, where Paul introduces persecutions and tribulations. Then he makes it positive. He puts a positive spin on those things by saying, "they're manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God", which might have seemed a little odd, perhaps, to those who were suffering persecutions and tribulations. However, this is a thought, of course, that runs deeply through the New Testament. Look at Romans 8 and verse 17 by way of an example, again the author is Paul, and he's saying:

Romans 8:17 and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

James is, of course, another writer that's recorded here in the New Testament, saying we should count tribulations and trials with all joy because they produce testing of our faith. They produce, in the end, a perfect work, as James says. Nobody enjoys persecutions and tribulations, but God allows them to come, as they are part of the testing and the trying that produce growth, character, faith and strength within God's people. That is why it's a righteous judgment of God to allow these situations to exist. As we read on here, we glean the sense that the testing and the trying separates the wheat from the tares, the wheat from the chaff, so to speak.

2 Thessalonians 1:6 since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,

There will be trouble that comes upon God's people, but there is a day of reckoning. That parable carried that point through in terms of the harvest. There is a day of reckoning and we need to recognize and realize that; we may not get our "rights" now, in this day and age. But God knows what is right and what is wrong and there is a day of judgment.

7 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

Sometimes, as we deal with tribulations, the trials and the difficulties seem to mount. Right now, at this very point in time, I could draw a list. I keep a list on my desk of the names of people that need our prayers. At this point in time, there's some very serious trials that many of our members are going through. There are trials and tribulations, and they seem to be mounting. They're certainly not seeming to come along in any lesser degree. We've got to remember the end, when the Lord Jesus is revealed. That's what we have to keep our eye on and that's what Paul, here, is trying to convey to the Church - to his people.

8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, as always, the Church is faced with an enemy who constantly seeks opportunity to destabilize the "good seed." That is what's happening here in the planting of tares in amongst the good seed; it is a way of destabilizing the Church, God's people. Now, Peter wrote about this problem, so this is why I say it's not something unique. It is something that flows throughout the Church in its two thousand year history. In 2 Peter chapter 2, Peter is quite straightforward about this point when he says:

2 Peter 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you,

He's recognizing that this is an existing problem within the Church; of course they're dealing with it here. Paul is dealing with it very early on in relation to some of these other epistles when they were written. They all had to deal with it at some point in time.

...false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.
(The problem is)

2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

I want you to keep that in mind as we develop Paul's thoughts here in 2 Thessalonians; the way of truth - because truth becomes a very central subject to this letter.

3 By covetousness (Peter continues) they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

Notice the acknowledgement here of the existing problem with false teachers and the future ongoing problem for the Church. It has never ceased to be a problem for the Church of God because there is an enemy constantly seeking to plant tares in amongst God's wheat.

Three things to note that Peter was bringing to our attention. One is the deception - secretly bringing in deceitful words and destructive heresies. Secondly, blaspheming the way of truth - an assault on truth-based belief is something that the Church will have to suffer because the enemy hates truth. By truth I mean truth as God establishes truth, not man's assessment of truth. Satan hates it and will do everything he can to destabilize people from standing solidly on that truth. That's what Paul gets to in this letter. The third thing is the result of denying the Lord who bought them. We'll come back to that at another time; we'll spend a little more time with that. Romans 16 verse 17:

Romans 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, (now, this is another time and place but listen to the similarity) I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

19 For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.

Same thoughts there by Paul expressed to the Church in Rome as he's expressing to the Church in Thessalonica. Human nature plays into this scenario very well because Satan likes to plant tares among the wheat. The tares of human reasoning as opposed to divine revelation is a wonderful tare to destabilize. Let me just interject Isaiah 5 and verse 20:

Isaiah 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; (That is something a false teacher will do) Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Remember the three things that Peter brings out; the deception, blaspheming the way of truth and the resulting denial of the Lord Who bought them. That's what this will do, calling evil good and good evil.

21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

That's what a false teacher is and that's what a false teacher will do. According to the parable, God allows the two to grow together for a period of time, probably to test the wheat, as we're seeing indications here from the first verses here in 2 Timothy chapter 1; it being an evidence of the righteous judgment of God. There is a day of reckoning and we can take solace in that; nobody is getting away with anything. If there is a false teacher that's blaspheming the word of God, there is a day of reckoning. We don't need to worry about that or be concerned about that. God will take care of it.

Back in 2 Thessalonians 1 verse 9:

2 Thessalonians 1:9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. (This is clearly a reference to Church; those who have been called by God and have God's Holy Spirit.)

11 Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power,

12 that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is encouraging the members to meet the challenge of the tares being amongst them head-on, on the ground - on the battlefield, if you like. Tares cause suffering, persecutions and tribulations. By meeting them head-on and fighting them, the members can grow and develop the character and nature of God to the point they will achieve "that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be glorified in you."

What Paul writes and the way he writes it is an aspect of the gospel, because he refers to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and their response and their reaction to it. What greater witness to the great glory of God than people who are living this way and glorifying the name of our Lord Jesus Christ? I think that is definitely an aspect of the gospel. I think it is an aspect of the work that we are to be doing. It comes up so often in the way that the gospel is referenced, particularly in the writings of Paul here, towards that end. The reference comes up again here in chapter 2. We will come to that.

Fighting means employing the weapons that we have been given. It is in the employment of those weapons that we will grow. For example, just look at the weapons we have, in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 10:

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (The enemy is moving around to plant tares in amongst.)

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (And Paul is going to get quite specific about some of that here in his letter.)

13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Part of the armor of God that you put on is the gospel of peace. Then he references the gospel a little further down. I think one of the purposes of the gospel is to produce the glorification of our God and His Son Jesus Christ within human beings; those that have the Spirit of God and who are God's. Of course, as Christ is glorified, the Father is glorified and vice versa. I think this understanding gives greater definition of what "doing the work" means. We have a powerful work to do within each one of us to achieve the "pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in" each one of us. A very, very powerful work.

Now we come to chapter 2 and Paul begins to reason - obviously somebody put a chapter break here is because of the change of direction of his comments. He begins to

address what has become a response or a reaction to some of the comments he made in his first letter. It appears that what was central to the trouble that was coming into the Church at that time was the timing of Christ's return. So, he begins now by saying in verse 1:

2 Thessalonians 2:1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you,

2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

That is an implication of false teachers. He says, "as if from us." He's saying it's not coming from us but there are those who are wanting to make out that they are speaking on our behalf and they're bringing trouble in amongst you. In Paul's first letter, did these people add their own interpretations to it and give a different emphasis to what Paul was meaning? He intended to encourage spiritual growth by looking at the goal. We saw that 1 Thessalonians 3 verse 13.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

I think I commented at the time that I don't think Paul intended to convey to the Church Christ was coming then and there. That, of course has been implied in the past. As I work with this material, however, I don't think that was really his intention. He was trying to draw their intention to Christ's return and the resurrection as a goal for them to look above and beyond the pagan mess that they found themselves in, in the city of Thessalonica. In chapter 5 verse 23 he said:

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I just don't get the sense that Paul is saying "Be ready, He's coming in a week, a month. You've got to be ready." He's conveying a sense of urgency. There's no doubt about that. We should continue to convey a sense of urgency regarding the return of Jesus Christ for all the reasons that we've talked about recently in terms of the suddenness of it all coming together; in terms of the need for spiritual preparation, which takes time.

You can't go and get oil in your lamp immediately. It takes time to build the spiritual strength of faith and patience that is referred to here in scripture. It just takes time. If you wait until there is a specific occurrence to say "right, I'll do it now," it will be too late. Still, Paul was saying don't be shaken in mind or troubled.

Now, the timing of Christ's return may seem like a small thing to some. Some there were obviously saying it was then, at that time. Now, I just want to take a moment to rehearse a little history of the Church of God to show you the importance of what Paul is saying here of "don't be soon shaken of mind or troubled." There are two periods of time that the Church of God should note regarding this - two very important periods of time. Both could be referred to as years of disappointment.

The first period of time is 1844. In 1835 a recognized minister of the Church of God, William Miller, became convinced that he knew the timing of Jesus Christ's return. He set the date for Christ's return as being 1844. So, there were nine years of build up. From the time that this minister of the Church became convinced that he knew when Christ was returning to when the actual event was supposed to take place - nine years of anticipation was building up within the members. That's an important thing to note.

It didn't happen, obviously. We know now it did not happen. Yet for nine years it built and built and built - the anticipation that Christ was going to return in 1844. As I understand it, many of the members at that time got together and were singing hymns. Some were just in one place together, waiting for Christ to appear. As the night drew on obviously there began to be a letdown and it didn't happen.

Now, following that time - not immediately, but as a result of the anticipation and the disappointment (which is why it was called the year of disappointment) things began to change within the Church. We have two people who were part of the Church of God. James and Ellen G. White were a part of the Church, and they acknowledge this in their earlier writings and it's recorded that the Church was the Church of God. They were a part of the Church of God.

After the letdown and disappointment that Christ had not returned, things began to drift. Before long they began to introduce doctrinal deviations. Ellen G. White began to issue prophecies and she became known as a prophetess. Out of that developed the Seventh Day Adventist Church of God. They changed the name from Church of God to the Seventh Day Adventists. There was a major split at that time. The Church of God existed; the Church of God continued to exist, but then there developed the Church of God, Seventh Day. The Church fractured after the disappointment of Christ not returning in 1844 - that's the point.

The second year of disappointment was 1972 and I can speak of that personally because I was a member of the Church and I became employed by the Church in that year. We had places - and I say that because it didn't happen everywhere - where there were quite specific teachings given to the Church of God that the Church would flee in anticipation of Christ's return in January of 1972. That was given legs by the nineteen-year time cycles. There were reasons why that was developed. Whole sermons were given proving the fact that the Church was going to flee in January of 1972.

My wife and I were married in June of 1972 in Bricket Wood in England. I graduated in June of 1972, we were married and we were sent immediately back to Australia, employed by the Church. I spent the first year as a ministerial trainee before becoming ordained. The point is, I arrived in Australia just six months after the disappointment of January 1972 and I had firsthand knowledge and experience of the conditions that existed in the Church at that time.

Now, I will just speak personally here, but based on that experience, I believe with all my heart that the fracturing that we see in the Church today has its roots in the year of disappointment of 1972 because of what I saw and had to deal with. I spent the next twelve years as a minister pastoring churches in Australia, and I know what I had to deal with and I know where it came from. There was a great disappointment as people had anticipated the Church going to a place of safety. It didn't happen and the Church fractured as a result.

Paul says "Don't be soon shaken in mind or troubled" that Christ had not returned at that time. Some were saying He will return, He should return. Don't fall into that trap because it's not going to end up in a good place if we get into that frame of mind.

2 Thessalonians 2:3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless (certain, specific things happen)

We can know within a general period of time when we're getting close to it because certain things will happen - Paul outlines them. Now, I'll say right here that Paul does not go through a very deep and specific outline of end-time prophecy. He focuses on one aspect of end-time prophecy because he's talking to the Church. What he focuses on has deep implications for the Church. So it's something for you and me to listen to.

...for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Now, you've probably been involved in some of these conversations that some people feel, dogmatically, that the falling away has taken place after the death of Mr. Armstrong. Certainly there has been a falling away, there's no denying that. As I look at this, I am not convinced that that is the falling away that Paul is referring to here because this seems to me to be a bundled package that Paul is presenting here signifying those things leading up to the return of Jesus Christ.

It would appear that in the revealing of the 'man of sin,' there is a falling away. That makes sense when you understand what the 'man of sin' does and its impact upon the Church. It's a very difficult time when this man is revealed and he begins to exalt

himself above all that is called God. It's going to be a very difficult time for the Church of God and those who will not recognize him for what he claims to be.

I will just stop at this point and inject some thoughts from Daniel. Obviously these events lead us to the book of Daniel. You could well go to the book of Revelation as well, but I won't spend time there because I don't want to get into all the aspects of "who is the beast" and so on. But this is an aspect of what happens when the beast power comes onto the scene. In Daniel 7 verse 7:

Daniel 7:7 "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. (These ten horns are identified here in a moment.)

8 I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.

We're talking about the fourth beast, which is the Roman Empire, clearly identified by Daniel's statue in chapter 2. So, there's some aspect to this fourth beast where there is a man that has a mouth speaking pompous words. Let's go on, still in chapter 7.

24 The ten horns are ten kings Who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first ones, And shall subdue three kings.

Clearly, as the fourth beast is the Roman Empire - but there is another very important aspect of this Roman Empire. That is a religious head that combines with the political body. This is what's being referred to here.

25 He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, (This is revealing the 'man of sin'. And this man is going to) ...persecute the saints of the Most High,

That's an aspect of the revealing of the 'man of sin.' This is where, I believe, we will see the falling away come into play, when this begins to happen. There's warning after warning after warning for the Church to be ready, and if the Church is not ready there will be some dire consequences. Matthew 25, Matthew 24, all of these scriptures warn us. It's time for us to be heeding these warnings, and I'll tell you why in a moment as we get deeper into Paul's letter.

...and shall intend to change times and law.

We can't change times and laws; they're God-given. It's truth that you and I cannot change. So, can you see some of the difficulties this is going to present?

...Then the saints shall be given into his hand

And so, when Paul talks about persecutions and tribulations and the will of God, he had a bigger picture in mind, I believe.

... for a time and times and half a time.

And that period of time of three and a half years (or 1260 days) appears in a number of forms relevant to end-time prophecy. While we're here in Daniel I would like to look quickly at chapter 11, picking it up in verse 31.

Daniel 11:31 And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.

32 Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.

People who know their God; the building of that relationship takes time and we would be smart to heed some of the warnings that we are being given now because we need the time that's available to us to know our God and form a relationship with Him that is going to carry us through some of the difficult times that are shortly ahead of us.

33 And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering.

When the beast power arises there is going to be tribulation which is the punishment of Israel before the Day of the Lord. God turns around, then, and punishes those He used to punish Israel.

34 Now when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help; but many shall join with them by intrigue.

35 And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time.

Some of those of understanding shall fall. Will this not represent a falling away that takes place under intense persecution? You know if you go to (and I thought I might but I chose not to because I got a little bit off-track from what Paul is writing about in Thessalonians) through Revelation 13. If you go through Revelation 13, it points out some of the great difficulties that come upon the Church.

One of the things that comes out toward the end of Revelation 13 is the sign. Those who don't carry the sign can't buy or sell, they can't involve themselves in commerce. That is going to be a horrendous trial for the people of God who stand upon truth and cannot compromise because of the very nature of what that truth is - some very difficult times. It then says that this man:

36 "... shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper (he's going to prosper as he does this) till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done.

As Paul was pointing out, there will be a day of reckoning. Yet for a while, he's going to be given a free hand, time, times and half a time. And so, this is where Paul is coming from as he points this out to the Church because it is about the impact upon the Church. It's not the punishing of Israel, as a whole, that Paul is referencing here, it's what impacts the Church. Coming back here to 2 Thessalonians 2 and in verse 5:

2 Thessalonians 2:5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

That's another key to me, that Paul didn't intend for them to think that he was saying Christ's return was right then, at that time. He was using it as a goal, as a carrot, so to speak. It's still there for us today to use to gain a sense of urgency for the things that we must be doing personally, privately and individually, in building a strong, reconciled relationship with our Father - because we're going to need it.

6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.

The timing is God's. We must consider what Paul is saying as a warning. Things may be restrained and maybe Satan will not be able to do all that he would like to do at this point in time, but there comes a time when he is given that freedom to persecute the Church with a great deal of strength. We have got to consider what Paul is saying here by way of a warning. It is a warning to the Church together with what Christ said (and Paul would have known what Christ said), of the suddenness of this unfolding. This 'man of sin' being revealed is going to happen quite suddenly, which means that the "mystery of lawlessness" is already at work.

You and I have no idea what is really going on behind the scenes, particularly I would say, within the Vatican. We have a Jesuit who is Pope at the moment, and you don't hear a lot of talk about the Jesuits and what they believe and what their goals and purposes are. They are still there all quietly underneath the surface. I think things are being put into place and it's only a matter of time before you and I will see them burst onto the world scene.

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. (Not the

instant he's revealed. He has a period of time. But there will be a day when God will deal with it.)

9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,

That is something that you and I have to factor into our understanding. There is a day coming of great deception. Remember what Peter said? I drew that point out from what he said about deception. Power, signs and lying wonders will be incredibly deceptive unless our roots are deep and firm on the truth that God has given us.

10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

This is not talking about Israel in general (physical Israel, the tribes of Israel); this is talking about spiritual Israel, the Church, and that "they did not receive the love of the truth." This is the time to be developing a love of the truth. That sense of urgency should be driving us to our knees and to our Bibles. We should be growing in strength right now, at this time.

11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,

Are you going to be one of those who believe a lie in the future because you're not solidly grounded in the truth of God? That you don't love the truth of God with all of your heart, with all of your mind, with all of your soul as we're instructed to with God's law?

12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

The warning here is quite specific. It is about truth. It is about those who love truth and about those who believe the truth with all of their being. God's people are the only people who have truth. They are the wheat. They are the ones to whom this warning applies. James 1 and in verses 16 through 18:

James 1:16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. (Now why would James say that if it were not possible to be deceived?) **Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (And truth has no variation, no shadow of turning.)

18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Does this thought of James not match the thoughts Paul, as he speaks to the Church in Thessalonica? He is saying that "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ might be

glorified in you? Firstfruits! We know we are firstfruits. We go through that every Day of Pentecost. There is a purpose for firstfruits. It's not just to gain salvation personally for yourself, but to be a witness to this world of the Great God who is a God of truth! It is to witness that there is truth in this world not recognized by the world. As we live it and stand on it and become and have a love for it, it is given to this world. It is part of the gospel message.

Now, as I went over this material, I became very impressed when viewed with a contemporary application. Recently in a sermon, I went over some of the philosophical developments that have taken place, trying to show a logical extension or development, a philosophical thought. In other words, the using of the human mind to find explanations for the supernatural, for God and so on and so forth.

We live in a very definite period of time - and this is not my stating. This is a generally accepted understanding that we are living in a period of time that is being labeled as the post-truth era. The Oxford Dictionary claimed, last year, 2016, that the word of the year was post-truth.

When I first read that, I thought, hmm. Post is one word, truth is another word. They are two words. I have come to understand that if you think that you're very good with the English language, you can write your own rules. And so, Mr. Oxford put a hyphen between post and truth and claimed it to be a compound adjective, one word.

I'm somewhat familiar with people who think they understand the English language very well and write their own rules because every time I write an update it goes through an extensive two step editing process. The first step is what divorces are made of. I give it to my wife and invariably she'll say, "That's a non-sentence. You can't say that." Well, I've just said it and it was brilliantly put! But you can't say it because it's a non-sentence. What's a non-sentence? There's a string of words. One follows the other. There's a capital at the beginning. There's a period (or for the Brits, a full stop) at the end. It's a full sentence! Well, no. Let's make our own rules here. It hasn't got this in it. It hasn't got a verb. It hasn't got...you can't say that!

So, post-truth is one word. Alright, it's a long way of coming down to that point. What does post-truth mean? Well, obviously, if it's the word of the year it has a meaning and essentially, it is a concept that objective facts are less important than emotion. That's the time you and I live in, and that is what you and I see every night on our news, if we're watching the news at night or whenever you catch up with what's going on in the world. That is truly what is happening. Objective facts – truth - is being submerged and replaced by emotional reasoning.

Now, the time of Paul – the time that Paul is referring to here - is a highly emotional time, as is the day we are in now. I don't think you could deny it. The recent events made today are very emotional. Post-truth is not a solid, firm foundation for us to stand

on. As we saw in Daniel 7, under the 'man of sin,' the saints of the most high will be persecuted. The word was '*bela*,' and it means 'to wear out.' Wear out to the point that they can be deceived - they get worn down.

The pressure to compromise will be great. Being worn down and exposed to what he says here in verse 9, "all power, signs and lying wonders" will be a huge test. God's commandments and faith are truth. I take that out of Revelation. Let me just go to Revelation for a moment, first of all Revelation 2, where it references the seven churches. Note that every Church is told they must be active. Look at verses 25 and 26 where it says:

**Revelation 2:25 But hold fast what you have till I come. (We have God's truth.)
...hold fast what you have till I come.**

26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations —

Paul puts it this way, "Stand fast and hold the traditions you have been taught." We'll read that verse here in a moment. So, what Christ tells us here in Revelation to the Church is the same as Paul. We're going to read that in a moment, where Paul says, "Stand fast and hold the traditions you have been taught." In Revelation 14 verse 12 we see this comment made about the saints. It says:

Revelation 14:12 Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

The word patience means endurance, constancy, and waiting. They're strong things. The commandments and faith are truth. The patience of the saints is that they hold firm to that truth. That truth, obviously, is being built day by day. It's not a single point that we come to. We read something; "okay that's a point of truth." Okay, I've got it. Truth has to be absorbed to be a part of our belief system. That has to be done day by day. Or, we could say it's not being done day by day.

Emotional reactions are not conducive to building truth (I'm going back to the comment about post-truth era), whereas they are conducive to being worn out. If we run on emotions and make our decisions on emotions, we will become worn out. Let's go back then to chapter 3 of 2 Thessalonians and continue with Paul's admonitions and encouragement to the people.

2 Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you,

2 and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. (And then, very importantly in verse 3)

3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.

So, that's an absolute promise for those who love the truth; those who believe the truth, those who stand fast and hold the truth tightly will be guarded from the enemy who goes around wanting to plant tares and cause disruption and destabilize people.

4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you.

5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

That's a positive at the end of the warning. We don't have to be victims of what the 'man of sin' brings about in terms of some very hard trials and difficulties upon the Church. We just don't - because God is faithful. He will take care of those people who love His truth and stand firmly on it.

Paul then turns his attention to something that is a problem in the Church. As I've studied this and looked at it I'm not sure exactly why it is a problem, but it is a problem. Paul has identified it in the first letter. He comes back to it in the second letter. He's concerned about those who walk disorderly in verse 6.

6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

He just told them to stand fast and hold the traditions that Paul has taught them. The word disorderly has moral implications; it creates disorder. This is a fairly serious situation, he's saying anybody who is morally causing problems among you, withdraw from them. He modifies that with counting them as a brother a little later. Let us read on.

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; (He set the right example among them and he's reminding them of that example.)

8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, (And so, whoever is walking disorderly here is apparently being a burden to the other members.)

9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

There was a problem here with people not being productive in their own lives and taking care of their families and their needs. Paul has to say bluntly, if you won't work then you don't eat. Don't go around to the other members, sponging off of them. I read

that term in one of the commentaries, sponging off the other members. I think it might be just a little more complex than that because of the moral overtones to it. However, it's a serious enough problem that it's causing difficulty within the Church.

11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

One translation I read said "mindful of everybody's business but their own." Maybe, in a post-truth era where there's a lot of emotional content rather than objective facts, that's what people tend to do, mind everybody's business but their own.

A point that we want to think about here in terms of applying it to ourselves is the part that technology plays in a post-truth era. We might need to think about social media and the part that it plays in "minding everybody's business but our own." Maybe that's an area that you and I need to seriously think about - not getting involved in some of the gossip and misinformation that is so easily spread by some of those means. It seems like everybody's business is posted up there. Maybe it's something for us to look at.

12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.

In other words, put your own house in order! Take care of your own responsibilities. I do want to turn to Galatians chapter 6 verses 6 through 10 where again in another instance, Paul writes:

Galatians 6:6 Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. (That seems to have some application here in Thessalonica.)

8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (So, put your efforts into the spiritual and take care of your own responsibilities.)

9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Again, as I say, it seems to have some application here in Thessalonians where Paul says, "Do not grow weary in doing good."

2 Thessalonians 3:14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.

The point here is that you admonish him as a brother. Do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. You take a positive step and the isolation of the

person is so that he will get the point that this is not acceptable behavior that he has engaged himself in.

It's not always the attitude that we see within some of the organizations of the Church of God toward each other, where we see violence in terms of relationships between organizations. We do good in love. Here is somebody that needs to learn something, and we're taking an action that will help them come to repentance.

Paul affirms that all he has said here in this letter has his authority, and his authority comes from Jesus Christ.

16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.

17 The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

And so, he signs off by saying, "I have written this. This did not come through a third party. It comes with my authority and I am an Apostle of Jesus Christ so it comes with Christ's authority." They were to pay attention to the seriousness of what Paul was telling them.

What is the take away that we have from 2 Thessalonians? We have an enemy who desires to plant destructive seeds - tares - amongst God's people to distract them from the work of the gospel "that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you!" Go back to that at the end of chapter 1.

2 Thessalonians 1:11 Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power,

12 that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you,

As I say, that bears some consideration on our part as far as our involvement in God's work and the preaching of the gospel. Let me just conclude with a similar thought from John in 1 John 2 verse 18, where John writes, now this is at a much later point in time:

1 John 2:18 Deceptions of the Last Hour Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.

This is another reference back to the parable we began with where there are many antichrists - many tares - in amongst God's people wanting to destabilize them.

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (They were definitely tares.)

20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.

That's referring to the Holy Spirit that is granted to us upon repentance and baptism. And you know all things. You know the truth. God has given us the truth

21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

22 Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.

23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

If you can take that and superimpose it over on the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians, you will see there's a very strong component here for handling the truth that God has given to us, not to be deceived. We have been given the truth and if we allow ourselves to be worn down, as is Satan's desire, and fall into some of the traps that will be set for us by the 'man of sin' and his working under the power of Satan, we could end up denying the Son and denying the Father.

So, it is very serious business that we work at here. 2 Thessalonians was really impacted on me when I had spent some time previous to this looking at what it means to exist in the post-truth era. Then to read this and see how much emphasis on truth that Paul gives. Maybe we as the Church in this era, the post-truth era, need to pay a whole lot of attention to objective truth and not get caught up in the emotions that are swirling around us in this society at the moment.

You know the truth! And your future will depend upon how much you love and hold on to that truth. ♦