

**Thoughts
From
II Thessalonians**

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Chapter 1:1-2 - Greetings

"Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God," stated the apostle Peter concerning the Old Testament writings (II Peter 1:21). The Holy Spirit had these men speak, and insured the preservation and collection of their selected writings (writing and speaking being equivalent as far as scripture is concerned) as the Old Testament Scrolls. The apostle Peter also regards the writings of the apostle Paul as scripture. "Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you," stated the apostle with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, noting that the untaught and unstable distorted Paul's words, "as they do also the rest of the scriptures" (II Peter 3:16). It is clear, then, that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul in his writings as preserved in the sacred writ, as well as the other men whose messages ended up in the collection of New Testament scrolls. Thus, in this second epistle to the Thessalonian brethren, we find some special nuggets of information and exhortation not found in any other writings, and preserved and published for the benefit of modern saints as well as those to whom it was originally written.

- **Paul and friends** - When the apostle Paul wrote to a congregation, he often included his co-laborers in his greeting. "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, he says in his greeting, identifying his companions. Writing from Corinth as he did in his first epistle, this second letter from the same brethren who had worked amongst the saints in Thessalonica follows soon upon the heels of the first. Silvanus is the "Silas" of the book of Acts, Roman citizen, new covenant prophet, and originally one of the leading men in the congregation in Jerusalem. Timothy is the young man converted in Lystra on Paul's first missionary journey, circumcised and thus permitted to speak in the Jewish synagogues on the second missionary journey, Paul's faithful companion from thenceforth, and of "kindred spirit" with the apostle himself.
- **The church** - The apostle and his co-laborers write, then, "to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (II Thessalonians 1:1). Increasingly, the idea of "church" is being denigrated in Western Society due to the destructive actions of false/denominational "churches," and the portrayal in the entertainment industry of church people's being a bunch of hypocrites. Many of the denominations, sensing this and wanting to keep their "market share" increasing, have rebranded themselves using names other than that containing the word "church." However, the church - the ekklesia - is what Jesus started, saying that the bedrock truth that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God," is the foundation upon which His church would be built (Matthew 16:16-18). Therefore the church in Thessalonica consisted of those who were in God the Father and in Christ Jesus the Lord. This is a result of their being *immersed into Christ* (Romans 6:3), and in consequence being *immersed into the body of Christ* (I Corinthians 12:13). The church, of course, "is His body" (Ephesians 1:22,23).
- **Grace and peace** - What a beautiful greeting and prayer: "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thessalonians 1:2) Saints need God's abundant grace to sustain them as well as grant them compassion as they work through their challenges and sufferings. And certainly the peace that passes understanding is to be desired greatly, and actually is available to the faithful Saint.

Jesus' advice is to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). If the saint will do these two things, then the guarantee is that all that is necessary for earthly life will be added to him. But as long as the "kingdom of God" remains the church at large in the mind of the believer, his commitment is ethereal and he is actually noncommittal. But, as in Thessalonica, the local congregation is the tangible expression of the kingdom. When a disciple of Christ makes the church where he regularly assembles his foremost commitment, then structure is provided for his life, and God can start adding the blessings.

Chapter 1:3-4 - Speaking Proudly

Arrogant pride, boastful pride, or stubborn pride are destructive, and prevent an individual from carrying out the will of God. Hence in the Scriptures, pride is generally regarded as a bad quality. "Pride goes before destruction," noted the wise Solomon, "and a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Proverbs 16:18). "Behold," chimed in Habakkuk, "as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). "All of you," exhorted Peter, "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (I Peter 5:5). But there is a different connotation to *pride* that has a positive thrust. For a man to take pride in his work - to do it well for the glory of God - is a good thing. This is true in the spiritual arena as well: "For our proud confidence is this," Paul informed the Corinthians, "the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not on fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you" (II Corinthians 1:12). When brethren do well, there is reason to be proud of them!

- **Giving thanks** - Men like the apostle Paul did not want to labor in vain; that is, they did not want their efforts with people to be wasted because the people they immersed did not maintain the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. He therefore was excited to be able to write in positive terms concerning the brethren in Thessalonica. "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren," the apostle opens this second epistle, "as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged ..." (II Thessalonians 1:3). Anyone who has had a business fail or a relationship dissolve has an idea of what it is like for all the work simply to "go up in smoke." How much more the loss for those who labor for the eternal souls of the lost, and then to have all their efforts fail to have any long-term converts. Paul was thus thankful that the brethren's faith was intact and actually increasing.
- **Faith enlarged** - The Christian life is to be a life of increasing faith. Even the apostle Paul, when he wrote to the congregation in Corinth describing his Suffering in Ephesus, indicated "that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (II Corinthians 1:8). God so orchestrates the lives of Christians that His purpose of increasing their faith is accomplished, So long as they continue to work God's program. The disciples in Thessalonica suffered greatly also in accordance with the plan of God, but they responded positively so that Paul could excitedly say, "your faith is greatly enlarged!"
- **Love increased** - Another of God's goals is that His love be reproduced in His children of faith. The Thessalonians were thrown together - because of their belief that Jesus was raised from the dead - into the cauldron of suffering. Enduring persecution and encouraging each other, the result was obvious to Paul that "the love of each of you toward one another grows ever greater."

Since God's plan was being executed in the congregation in Thessalonica, both in a general and personal sense, Paul was greatly encouraged. "Therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you," he lauds their faithfulness and love, "among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all the persecutions and afflictions which you endure" (II Thessalonians 1:4). He was proud of them in the positive use of the term *proud*, and was happy to compliment them. As modern saints increasingly face persecution and affliction by the will of God, may our faith be enlarged, our love increased, and the true spiritual leaders be able to speak proudly of us also!

Chapter 1:4-7 - Righting the Wrong

People have an innate sense of justice. But since justice is rare this side of glory, there is often a lot of frustration and rage at the corruption that goes on, especially when the descendant of Adam is the victim of injustice himself. The root cause of the injustice, corruption, and destruction is, of course, Satan the destroyer. "He was a murderer from the beginning," said Jesus, and "the father of lies" (John 8:44). But, lest anyone try to put all the blame on the devil as did Eve, God holds the human race accountable on an individual basis. People willingly step into the tempter's traps, and hence are responsible for their own participation in rebellion against God. That rebellion often breaks out in the persecution of Christians, as in Thessalonica of old. The saint of God, though, instead of being frustrated and enraged at the injustice of the world, recognizes it is part of following Jesus. "If they persecuted Me," averred the Savior of the world, "they will also persecute you." One of the major encouragements in the midst of this persecution is the other half of Jesus' statement: "If they kept My word, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20). There will be someone in the midst of the controversy who will be interested in the truth and willing to obey the gospel. That makes it all worthwhile.

- **In the midst** - The apostle Paul is thankful for the brethren in Thessalonica's being able not only to keep their faith intact, but to continue to move forward in the gospel. "Your faith is greatly enlarged," he comments commendably, "and the love of each of you toward one another grows ever greater." Thus he is able to speak proudly of the Thessalonian brethren among the churches spread throughout the eastern Roman Empire, "for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure" (II Thessalonians 1:4). That persecution and affliction was considerable, Paul himself personally experienced, being run out of Thessalonica very shortly after his first preaching there.
- **God's righteous judgment** - God makes it clear that He will right the wrongs inflicted on His people. Even Hannah, the humble hand-maiden of the Lord and mother of Samuel in the Old Testament was aware of God's justice, and made mention of it in her prayer of thanksgiving for the birth and dedication of her first-born son. "He keeps the feet of His godly ones," she affirmed to the Lord, "but the wicked ones are silenced by darkness" (I Samuel 2:9). This suffering and affliction dealt to the saints is "a plain indication of God's righteous judgment," remarks Paul, "so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering (II Thessalonians 1:5). How encouraging it is for brethren to know, because it is a statement inspired and backed by the Holy Spirit, that the Suffering of true Saints points to the eventual judgment of God on those inflicting the persecution, unless the persecutors themselves repent and join the ranks of the suffering as well.

In his Roman epistle the apostle Paul noted that disciples of Christ are fellow heirs with Christ "if indeed we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified with Him" (Romans 8:17). Saints must suffer to be considered worthy of the eternal kingdom of God. But the suffering is not the end of the story. "For after all," Paul informs the brethren, "it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven" (II Thessalonians 1:6,7). The affliction of the rebellious, of those who persecuted the church of God, will be immense - really beyond comprehension - in the dark fires of a Christless hell. The Saint can be encouraged; God will right the wrong!

Chapter 1:7-9 - The Revealing of Jesus

The great hope of the Christian centers about the return of the Lord Jesus. At that time he will receive the positive resurrection from the dead. But more importantly than that, he will be able truly to see the face of his Savior and King. "Beloved," the aged apostle John would write, "now we are the children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (I John 3:2). Properly understood, saints will earnestly desire to see the face of Him who loved them enough to give Himself for them. So this is the hope of the Christian, eagerly to await the triumphant return of the King.

- **Jesus is coming back** - The World laughs at the concept of Jesus' returning in judgment, and mocks and ridicules those who believe in His coming back. But both Old Testament and New Testament writings affirm the return of Christ and the day of judgment. "Men will go into caves of rocks, and into holes of the ground," prophesied Isaiah, "before the terror of the Lord, and before the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble" (Isaiah 2:19). Of those who persecute those who possess the name of Christ, Paul writes, "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire" (II Thessalonians 1:7). It is very clear that at the apokalupsis - the revealing - of the Lord Jesus that the evil among men will be judged and punished. There is none of the nonsense about a "rapture," a "seven-year tribulation," and a "thousand-year reign of Christ" before this judgment begins.
- **Retribution** - When Jesus comes back to reward the saints, He will also punish evil men. He is described as "dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thessalonians 1:8). This retribution will be severe, what Jesus called the outer darkness. Closing one of His parables. He spoke in very direct language. "And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness," spake He, "in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:30). Nothing about that sounds like a desirable eternal - vacation Paul describes this Christless hell in these terms: "And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the lord and from the glory of His power" (II Thessalonians 1:9). Away from the presence of the lord on this is why it is described as outer darkness: because God is light, and where God is not, it is darkness. To be eternally alone, to be eternally in darkness, to be eternally in pain of these cause the mind to crumple at the thought, to "blow a fuse", so to speak. Any individual who would properly process this will believe whatever God wants him to believe and do whatever God wants him to do so that he does not end up in this awful place.

When Jesus appears in His second coming. He will bring with him the saints whose spirits and souls have resided in Paradise. As the apostle Paul described this return in his first Thessalonian epistle, he pointed out that "God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (I Thessalonians 4:14). But the Scripture also pictures the angels of God as coming with Christ, as Paul avers, noting that He will "be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire." It will be an awesome and victorious day for the saints when the heavens light up like they are on fire, and those angels appear. Be ready, and eagerly awaiting!!

Chapter 1:9 - Judgment Day

Most people live in the realm of their own imagination in regard to the return of Christ to judge the world. "All dogs go to heaven," and apparently all people do also! Of course, this is not really the case, as the word of God clearly establishes. Most of the residents of this planet try to bend the circumstances around them as best they can to make them fit what they want. At a certain survivor level, this is certainly necessary, but for the most part, members of the human race are just being selfish and trying to manipulate people and events to serve their own personal interests. Hence, with these mental habits ingrained, they also tend to try to manipulate eternity - in their minds - to serve their own desires. The Almighty God, however, has His own plan and His own righteous sense of justice, and all men everywhere should repent and bring their thinking and perceptions in line with His.

- **Judgment on those who do not know God** - The first general group of people upon whom God's righteous retribution will fall will be on those "who do not know God." The eternal Father has made it clear that ignorance is no excuse. He has laid enough threads of truth on the floor of everyone's life so that if a person would pick up even one of those threads, it would lead straight to the Bible and straight to God. "A search for truth in any area leads to God." If anyone would seriously ponder the Creation, it is clear that only a Supreme Being could have created it; it could not, with all its intricacies, have come into existence by time and chance. "For since the creation of the world," affirmed Paul to the Roman brethren, "His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). This is not just Paul's analysis, it is the analysis of the Holy Spirit. Not only that, the gospel of Jesus Christ has gone out to the entire world; men must not only know that there is a God, but that He specifically has been revealed through Jesus Christ. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father," was Jesus statement (John 14:9). "Having overlooked the times of ignorance," stated the apostle to the collection of people on Mars Hill in Athens, "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30,31). The days of ignorance are gone; the judgment of God rightfully will fall upon those "who do not know God."
- **Judgment upon those who do not obey the gospel** - It is one thing to know who God is because He has been revealed through the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is another to "obey the gospel." There are many who think that simple belief in the gospel is all that is necessary for eternal salvation. The scriptures, however, show that the gospel must not only be believed, but the gospel must also be obeyed. The first time in the history of the world that the gospel of Christ was preached was the Jewish feast of Pentecost recorded in Acts chapter two. When numerous in the audience were pierced to the heart over their guilt of crucifying their Messiah, they cried out, "What shall we do?" The first part of the answer was for them to "repent," which involved their changing their thinking. But the other part, where real obedience is expressed, is in being "immersed in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). This is where the gospel is initially obeyed, and is essential for a person to walk forever with Jesus in white.

Thus it is clear what an individual must do if he is to turn from darkness to light. Anyone who fails to know God, or who fails to obey the gospel will be in the lake of fire.

Chapter 1:9-10 - When Jesus Comes

There is hope, and there is empty or vain hope. God is doing mankind a huge favor by making an opportunity for them to be rescued from the folly of their own personal sins, and He is caring enough to clarify how it will all end for the fallen race. By making clear the rewards or consequences of their spiritual choices, God has effectively and helpfully closed the door to vain hope. Everyone who ends up in hell actually made the choice to be there, and everyone who obeys the gospel and is ushered into eternal glory is going to know exactly what choices they made in the believing and obeying that resulted in their justification. In spite of God's goodness and graciousness, many persist in stiffening their necks and hardening their hearts so that, even though they are hell-bound, they refuse to look at the scriptural evidence concerning their condition. These are those who "do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

- **The penalty** - God is very clear throughout the writings of the new covenant that anyone who does not participate in the faith of Christ is doomed. "They stumble," said Peter, "because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed" (I Peter 2:8). "And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction," affirms Paul, "away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power when He comes..." (II Thessalonians 1:9,10). Some, when they read the word *destruction*, think that the individual just ceases to exist, that he somehow just evaporates in the fire. While there may be some small comfort in that thought, that is not how the overall word of God portrays the judgment upon the unbelievers. One such depiction reads thusly: "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name" (Revelation 14:11). This is a place of eternal darkness, away from the presence of Him who is light, away from the glory of His power. Deadness, aloneness, and excruciating pain afflict those who choose wrongly.
- **His glory** - Jesus is returning in "power and great glory" (Luke 21:27). "And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it," is the apostle John's disclosure, "from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them" (Revelation 20:11). Faithful brethren are usually pictured as awaiting this day with *eagerness*, for which they have been praying *Maranatha* for all their conscious Christian lives. It will be exciting for them "when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed - for our testimony to you was believed" (II Thessalonians 1:10). Jesus' earnest desire, expressed in His prayer before He crossed the Kidron to the Garden of Gethsemane, is that His disciples might see His glory. This glory must be tremendously awesome; the *marveling* that the saints will be doing must be beyond current comprehension.

None of this has happened. Jesus has not returned, nor have the sentences of judgment day been handed down. The unbeliever may tend to be skeptical, saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" The apostle Paul mentioned to the multitudes in Athens Areopagus that there would certainly be a day of judgment, proof of which was that God has raised Jesus from the dead. This, of course, was the testimony Paul had borne concerning Jesus when he first came to Thessalonica, and this testimony was believed by the faithful brethren in the congregation there. As certain, therefore, that Jesus is risen, so it is that He is coming in judgment, and to be marveled at by all faithful saints. Are you ready?

Chapter 1:11-12 - To This End

The gospel is first Christ-centered, then others-centered. Certainly every Christian needs to “put his own house in order,” but even that will fail if its major purpose is to benefit the one in the process of rearranging his house. Jesus Himself set the example, making such statements as, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many,” and “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Matthew 20:28, Luke 19:10). Once the individual has secured his initial salvation, then the focus must center on Christ in glory, followed by seeking and saving the lost and serving the saints. The apostle Paul, in encouraging the brethren in Thessalonica, reminded them that God would repay with affliction those who afflicted the disciples of Christ: those who did not know God and those who did not obey the gospel of Christ. This will happen at Jesus’ return when He comes to be glorified in His saints.

- **What God could do** - Paul walked in the footsteps of Jesus, and in his others-focused mindset, conscious of the wide divide between the lost and saved at the Lord's return, prayed for the brethren. “To this end,” are his words, desiring the faithful continuance of the brethren, “also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power” (II Thessalonians 1:11). The apostle Paul, one of whose major purposes was to preach the gospel to the lost that they might be saved, is also concerned that the brethren remain faithful until death. Therefore it is in great earnestness that he prays that God might count them worthy of their calling as Christians, and justify them before the great white throne. In his true and honest love for them, he also wants the Father to fulfill every desire that they have for goodness. Children of God have been called out of darkness into God's light; therefore the new heart and renewed mind desire goodness, and Paul is willing to appeal to the All Wise for their desires to be granted. He also refers to “the work of faith.” This *work of faith*, as contrasted to the works of the Law, references the participation of the disciples of Christ in the forward movement of the gospel, and their part in overpowering those spiritual forces that resist the efforts of God to reach and reconcile man. Because this warfare is intense, he prays that they may be able to do this work “with power.”
- **The purpose** - God has always had a long-term purpose in bringing into existence a race of spiritual men, formed out of the crucible of the old man which was buried in the waters of immersion. As Paul continues his prayer for the faithful brethren in Thessalonica, he emphasizes the purpose of God, stating, “in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (II Thessalonians 1:12). The minor prophet had forecast, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the Sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). Through the precious saints of the new covenant, the name of Jesus is being glorified, and thus the knowledge of the glory of the Lord is spreading all over the earth. It is not surprising, then, that this would be a focus of the apostle Paul's prayer.

Ultimately, everything depends upon the grace of God. *Grace*, in a general sense, refers to all things which come from God's hand. Hence the saints' being worthy of God's calling would be by His grace, just as their ability to fulfill their desires for goodness, or their success in carrying out the work of faith through His power, is all by His grace - a joint grace of God and the Lord Jesus. May His grace abound in modern saints. For “it is to this end” that Paul prayed, and we also pray.

Chapter 2:1-3 - Confusion about Christ's Coming

The charlatans of the world have always generated as much confusion as possible about Jesus' second coming. Many work to convince people that Jesus is not coming again, period. Others work to persuade the gullible that Jesus' second coming has already occurred. Others work to destroy the nature of His coming, or create confusion about the time. One of the reasons for all this confusion is to demotivate the saints. A clear understanding of Jesus' return is one of the key ingredients in the brethren's ability to maintain their focus and enthusiasm; hence confusion results in a corresponding loss of motivation.

- **“Our gathering together”** - Jesus, said the apostle Paul, is coming again to deal “out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel.” This is part of the motivation that the apostle is bringing to the attention of the disciples in Thessalonica, noting that “it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.” Thus, if there is no second coming or if the coming has already occurred, then these words are nonsense. “Now we request you, brethren,” is the earnest appeal of the apostle, “with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him...” (II Thessalonians 2:1). Three things are obvious from Paul's opening gambit here: Jesus is coming; that coming is still in the future as he writes; and the saints will be gathered together with Him at His coming. “He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet,” said Jesus concerning the Son of Man, “and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other” (Matthew 24:31).
- **“Be not disturbed”** - The forces of confusion - then, as now - were using every avenue available to create confusion and disruption. In regard to Jesus' second coming, appeals Paul, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come” (II Thessalonians 2:2). Once again, there are some conclusions that can be drawn from Paul's comments. It is to be noted that the evil spirits do speak, and claim that they come with the authority of the apostles behind them. Also, messages drift through the brethren that are false; in this case, the rumor in motion was that Jesus had already come and they had missed Him. In addition, bogus letters - claiming to be from the apostles - were circulating among the brethren. These things still happen in modern times. The advantage the modern saint has is that he knows that the only information available is that which is contained in scripture; anything else is clearly from some source other than God.
- **The apostasy** - Paul did not want the saints in Thessalonica to be disturbed by false rumors - regardless of their source - that Jesus had returned and they had missed that event. “Let no one in any way deceive you,” is his injunction, “for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first ...” (II Thessalonians 2:3). The scripture predicts a massive falling away (apostasy) from the original faith, and that the Lord's return would not happen before that occurrence. “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith,” Paul informed Timothy (II Timothy 4:1). The grand apostasy was coming, and no saint of the first century should be deceived by any rumors or letters or spirit “revelations” that the second coming had occurred.

The modern saint should be aware that a massive falling away from the original faith has occurred, and should not be discouraged by that. The spirits, their messages, their letters might have convinced others along the way to participate in false doctrine, but the saint of God can fully rely on what is written in God's holy word. But he had best be knowledgeable!

Chapter 2:4 - Man of Lawlessness

There is much confusion about the man of lawlessness referred to by the apostle Paul in his second epistle to the Thessalonian brethren. This expression comes out of Paul's comments about a future (from his time perspective) massive falling away from the original faith prior to Jesus' second coming. "Let no one in any way deceive you," he asseverates, for [the second coming] will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction ..." To many of modern times, confused about "the rapture," a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, and Jesus' coming down to reign on earth for a thousand years, this "man of lawlessness" is *the Antichrist*, an evil Hitler-type of madman who will execute a severe reign of terror lasting seven years over the earth from this temple rebuilt in Jerusalem. (This also corresponds to the second beast of Revelation 13:11-18 whose number is the dreaded 666!) To anyone who has a modicum of understanding about the kingdom of Christ - knowing that it is a reference to the church — and knowing that Jesus is reigning now, this whole premillennial perspective on the "man of lawlessness" is nonsense.

- **More on the apostasy** - Paul speaks to Timothy concerning the fact that many would "fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods" (I Timothy 4:1-3). While there are a number of religious bodies (such as a number of those grouped in the modern New Age movement) which advocate celibacy and avoiding of meats, the only one which fits the category of apostasizing from the original faith is Catholicism (in the west, Roman Catholic; in the east, Greek Catholic Orthodox). Hence, when the apostle speaks of claiming the fact that the second coming of Christ cannot occur until "the apostasy" happens, he is speaking of the development of Catholicism in a massive way, and its overshadowing of the real church of Jesus Christ.
- **The man of lawlessness** - The man of lawlessness, termed also "the son of destruction," is further described as the one "who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as God" (II Thessalonians 2:4). The temple of God, from a new covenant perspective, is the church of the Lord. The one who would take the place of God as the head of the church would be the developing papacy. Certainly the "Pope" the Big Papa claims to be head of the church. He is addressed as "his holiness," and he receives the worship of men, sticking out his ring to be kissed. "The man of lawlessness" is a personification of the concept of the papacy, which developed as an outgrowth of the apostasy called Catholicism.

Catholicism and the Papacy developed as a result of the work of demonic influences on men with lying tongues. These forces of deception created the confusion about Jesus' return in the first place, and twisted the early apostolic beliefs into the modern tortured versions of Catholicism. Even then, Paul had to warn about "a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us." They were claiming apostolic authority, much as the false prophets of the Old Testament claimed to speak as from God. "Test the spirits," the apostle John said to those first century brethren, "to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). For us of the modern time, we know that no one can receive a revelation from God. So anyone claiming to bring doctrines by revelation is clearly false. But everything else must be carefully compared to the scriptures, to see if it lines up squarely with God's holy word. If it does, then it is true. If it does not, it is false, and it must be exposed as such. Even Catholicism!

Chapter 2:5-8 - Mystery of Lawlessness

The forces of darkness, by definition, work in darkness. Unable to stand up to the exposure of light, they must cloak themselves in secrecy and carry out their activities in conspiratorial fashion. This is *the apostasy* prophesied by Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians and his first letter to Timothy. Acting in accordance with, and at the urging of, the prince of darkness, they surreptitiously seek to secure positions of influence inside Christ's church, and divert its energies for personal gain and prominence. "Certain persons have crept in unnoticed," was Jude's analysis and expose (Jude 1:4). Similar warnings of the others - Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John - should not be lightly dismissed, but rather should encourage each Saint to "make certain about His calling and choosing you" (II Peter 1:10). Each disciple of Christ must become a student of the Word, and increasingly able to discern between truth and falsehood.

- **Early developments** - The scripture predicted *the apostasy*; it did not record the history of its development because the scripture was completed before the apostasy completely formed. It is well documented that, even before the apostles were all dead, changes began to occur in the way the local congregations were governed. Each local congregation, biblically, is an independent entity, governed by elders in conjunction with evangelists (when the congregation is completely formed). When Paul spoke to the elders of Ephesus, for example, he exhorted them, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Herein the three descriptive titles given to these men are brought forth: They are *elders* - older men; they are *bishops* — overseers; and they are *pastors* - shepherds. These elders were subject directly to the Holy Spirit (or Jesus, as the Head of the church), not to any intermediary authority. But, as Paul informed the brethren in Thessalonica, "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work" (II Thessalonians 2:7). Fleshly-minded men were already pushing themselves into positions of prominence, setting the stage for a power struggle within these congregations rather than focusing on seeking and saving the lost. Hence Paul and Peter were barely in their graves when some men began elevating themselves as *bishops* over the *elders*; this lawlessness triggered the development of further perversions of the Lord's organizational structure for the local church.
- **Escalating authority** - As these "bishops consolidated power, they also eliminated the office of evangelist. Evangelists, by the Lord's design, served as a check on the bishops. When the bishops sinned (the desire for power being one of those sins), evangelists (or preachers) were to "rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may be fearful of sinning" (I Timothy 5:20). With evangelists out of the way, the path was now cleared for the escalation of authority. Bishops then began to be over several sets of elders in a district which came to be called a *diocese*. Then there needed to be an *archbishop* over the bishops, then a *patriarch* over the archbishops. Finally, in the western area of what had been the Roman Empire, the *universal bishop* (or Pope) claimed to govern every congregation.

This development to the papacy took nearly 600 years, the Pope being "the man of lawlessness...who takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as God." Paul further explains: "Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. 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. And then that lawless one will be revealed" (II Thessalonians 2:5-8a). Following a series of increasing attacks by Germanic tribes from the north, Rome officially fell in AD 476. With the emperor ("he who now restrains") gone, the papacy could openly develop, and thus the "man of lawlessness" be revealed.

Chapter 2:8-9 - Activity of Satan

Satan is, in his rebellion against God, taking advantage of every fleshly lust and every weakness in the world and in Christians themselves. As one who disguises himself as an angel of light, he engages in spiritual fraud and deception on a massive scale, working - if possible - to deceive even the elect. His demonic assistants developed the doctrines that resulted in *the apostasy* and eventual formation of the Roman Catholic Church. The apostle Paul, in his writings to the church at Thessalonica and his protégé Timothy, warned the early Christians about the coming major falling away from the original faith. But few listened. Step by step the Catholic Church developed into its own organization, with the western half eventually accepting a *universal bishop*, or Pope. This, then was the *man of lawlessness* Paul also said was coming and would be revealed when "what restrains him" was taken out of the way. The end of the Emperorship in Rome paved the way for the development of this papal power, and the iron fist of the papacy was "revealed, whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth by the appearance of His coming" (II Thessalonians 2:8). Roman Catholicism, and her sister from the time of the "great schism," - the "Orthodox" belief system - will endure until Jesus comes again.

- **In accord with Satan** - The apostle Paul repeatedly warned his readers and his hearers about the major threat that would be posed by this *man of lawlessness* and accompanying deception. "Do you not remember," he had stated, "that while I was with you, I was telling you these things?" (II Thessalonians 2:5). It was subtle, making one change at a time; and it was gradual, taking hundreds of years fully to implement. Because of its subtlety and gradualism, most did not recognize what was happening, and what once was the church of the New Testament was transformed into something else. The "coming," or appearing, of the man of lawlessness, predicts Paul, "is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders" (II Thessalonians 2:9). Catholicism has been built on the claims of all kinds of miracles and visions. To be "elevated to sainthood" in the Roman Catholic Church, for example, two "miracles" must have been performed by the candidate considered for "canonization." There is a definite dark "power" working through the Catholic Church, crushing the souls of millions and oppressing the truth wherever possible. Any of the "exorcisms" performed and publicized by priests and the Catholic Church are "false wonders," and designed to lead people away from the truth of the scripture.
- **Deception of wickedness** - The apostle Paul warned Timothy, saying that this apostasy would develop through those who would be "paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars" (I Timothy 4:2.3). On May 13, 1917, an apparition of "the Blessed Virgin Mary, brighter than the sun, appeared to three children near Fatima, Portugal, with revelations that were incorporated into the Catholic belief system and Catholic missals. This is typical of the continuing development of Catholic doctrine, coming, as Paul and the Holy Spirit predicted, "with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish" (II Thessalonians 2:10). Many millions believe in these types of deception, and on a scale so large that the deceptions of the founder of the Mormons-Joseph Smith, Jr. - or one of the modern so-called Pentecostal movement "prophets" pale into insignificance in comparison.

"God is not a god of confusion," averred Paul, but there is someone who is - Satan - the one who deceives the Gentile peoples of this world (I Corinthians 14:33). One of his goals is clearly to create so much confusion that most people simply give up in trying to find the truth. But the truth that God created the material realm is evident to all who will examine the creation, so that mankind is without excuse. And the truth that will set man free is found in the sacred scriptures, whose truths can be unpackaged and examined by those who will seek and find.

Chapter 2:10-12 - Lovers of Truth

Jesus guarantees that all who are truth-seekers will be saved. And He further guarantees that all who are not lovers of truth will die the eternal death. "This is the judgment," was the way Jesus described it, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Some speak of "all the good people" they have known, and think that all these are going to heaven because they are these good people. But here is the divine analysis: "There is none righteous... there is none who does good" (Romans 3:10-12). Hence the only solution for such a one is to come to Jesus - the light - on His terms. "For everyone who does evil," stated the Lord, regarding those who would depend upon their own righteousness, or who just would not care, "hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:20). But there are those who are seeking for truth, who, as Jesus put it, "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6). "But he who practices the truth comes to the light," is the unchallengeable statement of the Lord, "that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God" (John 3:21). Those who are truth-seekers, who desire to practice the truth, *will come to the light*. This is the Lord's guarantee.

- **Deception of wickedness** - Paul had prophesied the coming of *the apostasy*, the massive falling away from the original faith of Christ. This eventually evidenced itself in the formation of the Catholic Church, with the particular manifestation of the papacy of the Catholic Church based in Rome. This was the "one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness." This deception worked because it was gradual, and because those who thought - they were followers of Christ (in a general sense) did not have access to the Sacred Writ. Hence the incremental changes overtime produced a monster that was totally different than the original church of Christ. This deception was allowed to work to separate out "those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved (II Thessalonians 2:10).
- **Deluding influence** - God has continuing judgment, sifting the hearts of men and separating out those who are true from those who are not. "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God," was Peter's comment, contemporaneous with Paul, "and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God" (I Peter 4:17). The Father particularly allows things to work inside the church for continual refining, for fine-tuning the separation of the wheat from the chaff. "And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence," is Paul's phraseology, "so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" (II Thessalonians 2:11, 12). There are only two categories of men: those who believe the truth, and those who take pleasure in wickedness. So God allows various kinds of false doctrines, persecutions, faction-generators, etc., to work inside the body of Christ to extract all those who really are not followers of truth.

As Paul spoke to the elders of Ephesus: "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29,30). That was how it was then, and that is how it is now. Those who have the love of the truth will be able to sort it out; those who really are not lovers of truth will get side-tracked into false teaching and turn away from the Lord.

Chapter 2:13-14 - Thanks for the Brethren

"It is for this purpose also I labor," Paul had written the Saints in Colossae, referring to his goal that we may present every man perfect in Christ" (Colossians 1:28.29). *Labor* is certainly the correct word. It takes tremendous effort to seek and save the lost in the first place, and tremendous effort to continue to educate, train, motivate, and exhort the saints. The apostle was not particularly desirous that all his labor be wasted, or "in vain," as he occasionally phrased it. To the brethren in Thessalonica, his second epistle dealt with the coming *apostasy*, and the persuasive deluding influence that would sweep through anything resembling original Christianity. These delusions were very strong, and the result is that only those who loved the truth spiritually survived. As the judgment of God worked in those days following the establishment of the first century church, in the same way that judgment continues; thus all who pretend to love the truth, but who secretly take pleasure in wickedness, will be shunted aside into some false doctrine. The apostle definitely does not want this to happen, and is willing to praise and encourage the faithful brethren in Thessalonica.

- **Always give thanks** - The Holy Spirit allowed the apostle Paul to have a somewhat panoramic look at the future. Knowing about the coming massive falling away from the original faith, and the plunging of the world into spiritual darkness, he was thankful that he lived at the time that he did, and was likewise thankful for the followers of Christ in Thessalonica. "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by God," he compliments the Saints, "because God has chosen you from the beginning for Salvation..." (II Thessalonians 2:13). In God's massive orchestration of events, He knows who would decide to submit to Christ, and determined the time at which they were to be born. These thoughts are too high for our thoughts, and these ways are too high for our ways (Isaiah 55:9). The apostle believed in the faithfulness of these brethren, knowing that they were necessary as part of Christ's bringing His church into existence and spreading rapidly in those early years.
- **For salvation** - God uses the issue of eternal salvation as His beginning conversation piece. Carefully balancing His eternal plan with the responsibility of the individual's making his choices, "God has shut up all in disobedience, that He might show mercy to all" (Romans 11:32). Hence the divine analysis is that "all have sinned, and are desperately in need of being saved from their sins and the consequences thereof. Thus the gospel of Christ is presented, and those who are obedient to it are spoken of as "saved," or "redeemed." These brethren in Thessalonica are thus "chosen from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" (II Thessalonians 2:13). It was His plan that they would be born at the time and the location where the first century gospel would be preached and they would be among those who would obey. The scriptures often bring in the Holy Spirit as part of the discussion about salvation. This ties in with the terms given by the apostle Peter the first time the gospel was preached, that not only was forgiveness of sins mentioned, but the promise of the indwelling Spirit as well. These points were of course coupled with the concept that the individual Saint needed to have faith in the truth.

God - the Holy God - from the beginning has had a plan for producing a holy people, a special new race of people set apart or Sanctified by the Holy Spirit. "And it was for this," affirms the apostle to those brethren, "He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thessalonians 2:14). May we also heed the call, have faith in the truth, obey the gospel, be sanctified by the Holy Spirit, not be pulled away by deluding influences, and attain to the glory waiting for those who faithfully follow Christ.

Chapter 2:15 - Stand Firm

The forces of darkness are strong, and the forces of delusion are subtle and confusing. The apostle Paul, for example, had mentioned information coming from “a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us.” As soon as the early church came off the ground, the lying tongues began to imitate the apostles and their doctrines, but with Satanic twists that were totally destructive to the souls of men. These forces not only opposed the presentation of the gospel to the lost, but they tried to intimidate or discourage the saved and endeavored to obscure the message from God. One example of opposing the presentation of the gospel from the book of Acts is Elymas the magician in the presence of the proconsul Sergius Paulus, as Paul and Barnabas attempted to persuade the official concerning Jesus. “Elymas,” said Luke in the sacred writ, “was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith” (Acts 13:8). Inside the church, men created confusion by trying to bring the Law back into play. “Some men came down from Judea,” Luke also recorded, “and in regard to the fledgling congregation at Antioch, and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). They sounded authoritative, and, after all, they came from Jerusalem! Correspondingly, from the lawless side, Jude noted, “Certain persons have crept in unnoticed...ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness” (Jude 1:4). Therefore the apostle Paul is exhorting the brethren in Thessalonica to keep the faith in the face of such opposition.

- **Their calling** - Only a small percentage of earth's population is sufficiently interested in the truth to become a part of what the word of God terms “the called.” The way God calls, however, is not some voice in the night or some sign in the sky. God calls, in a very straightforward form, through the gospel. Those who obey the gospel are thus “the called,” and everyone else is “the lost.” “He called you through the gospel,” says Paul to the brethren, “that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” But being part of *the called* initially is not enough. As Jesus put it, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). The saint has to persevere through the obstacles of Christian life, and keep his faith intact until the end. The words of Jesus to the church at Smyrna stand as a significant warning, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Thus Paul writes this exordium to the brethren in Thessalonica, “So then, brethren, stand firm...” (II Thessalonians 2:15). In this way they would carry out the parallel injunction of Peter: “Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you” (II Peter 1:10).
- **Hold to what you were taught** - With the winds of false doctrine lashing against them, and the mighty waters of confusion swirling about them, the brethren needed to keep their focus and remember what they were taught, or they would lose their salvation. “Stand firm,” the apostle encourages, “and hold to the traditions you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.” The *traditions* have to do with the doctrines and practices ordained of the Lord and passed on to the early church by the apostles; they are not the additional traditions added by uninspired men who came after, regardless of later contrary claims.

Another name for the whole of new covenant teaching is the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). To deviate from the doctrines and practices clearly inculcated by the apostles (and the new covenant prophets, whose message was the same as and originated from the apostles) is to deviate from what the Lord Himself intended. False doctrine originates in the bowels of Satan's realm and leads to the eternal destruction of souls. It is not surprising, then, that Paul would so strongly encourage the brethren to stand firm and not to deviate from what he and the other inspired men delivered to them. And that message is just as true today. Do not deviate from the doctrines and clear practices of the church as revealed in the holy scriptures!

Chapter 2:16-17 - Paul's Written Prayer

Prayers can be spoken - verbally out loud or in the heart - or they can be written. In the case of the apostle Paul and many others who wrote sections of God's holy word, the prayers just flowed as they were writing because prayer was so much interwoven into the fabrics of their lives. The Holy Spirit, laying the foundation for the church and ensuring the inclusion of all the instruction necessary - necessary for the individual Christian and the church as a whole - preserved these prayers as examples and models for the brethren who would come following the deaths of the apostles. Hence Paul's written prayer on behalf of the Thessalonians is worthy of some parsing and examination.

- **Who is addressed** - Those of early Trinitarian bent generally held to the idea that prayers could only be addressed to the Father. That is one reason to examine the Holy Spirit inspired prayers of the new covenant writings, to see if that proposition holds true. "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father," is how Paul begins his free-flowing prayer (II Thessalonians 2:16). The first personage addressed is Jesus, and the second is the Father. Clearly prayers can be addressed to Jesus, and clearly prayers can be jointly addressed.
- **Proper praise** - Certainly Jesus is worthy of praise and adulation, as well as the Father. In this case Paul's praise is directly attached to the Father, "who has," he asserts, "loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace." As is often the case with the direct words of Jesus or the teachings in the epistles, information occupying small space is worthy of major pondering. These words are an example: God *has loved us*. For the great and awesome God, whom the heavens cannot contain, to notice us would be of major import all by itself, but for Him actually to love us is even more significant. Not only that, He *has given us eternal comfort*. How quickly those words roll off the tongue of the Christian! This is a theme that constantly surfaces in the sacred writings, but the saint may forget to ponder what it means to have this eternal comfort as contrasted to eternal punishment. In addition, Paul comments that He *has given us good hope by grace*. Those of the world are without real hope; they often have false hopes, or are hopeless. What a blessing it is for the faithful child of God to have real hope in his own resurrection, and this through the gift (or grace) of God! Certainly the disciple of Christ should constantly contemplate the eternal blessings he possesses, and continually fall on his face and praise Him who sits on the glorious throne.
- **The petition** - Having properly praised the Son and the Father, and having commented on what the Father had done for the brethren, the apostle then brings in his petition. He appeals to both the Son and the Father to "comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word" (II Thessalonians 2:17). *Comfort* is derived from the same concept as the Paraclete, the Helper. The picture is that Paul is petitioning the Father to *come alongside* to comfort, to encourage, to intercede for, and to help the brethren. Furthermore, the pleading includes the strengthening of the hearts of the saints, to help them be additionally encouraged, to persevere happily through challenges and difficulties and sufferings.

Overpowering supernatural opposition requires supernatural strength. Hence Paul was willing to pray to the appropriate Personages, to offer the appropriate praise to the same, and then to offer his petitions for the future of the church. What a great picture it is of the loving heavenly Father individually coming alongside, putting His arm around the shoulder of each saint, and providing the appropriate encouragement and strength. This is truly exactly what each child of God needs in order to fight his own victorious battle for the faith and to finish his course, to engage in every good work and word. May modern brethren place the proper weight on these words and petitions, and likewise be strengthened to charge enthusiastically into the fray!

Chapter 3:1-2 - Prayer for the Spread of the Word

This world does not exist simply so that mankind may have some comforts and pleasures. It does not exist so that electricity may be produced, or that information may be easily and digitally transmitted. This world exists at the pleasure of the great God and Creator of all, and His pleasure is the distribution of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When there is no one left who will believe enough to obey the gospel of God, then the Almighty will put an end to planet earth. No amount of so-called “green thinking” or reducing the “carbon footprint is going to change any of God’s plans. Jesus, during the years of His earthly sojourn, plainly stated, “I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled” (Luke 12:49). When He kindles it, earth goes up in Smoke. But as long as there is someone on this planet who is a truth-seeker. He will withhold His execution of judgment. In the meantime, the goal is to get the gospel out.

- **Prayers requested** - The apostle writes a prayer in this epistle for the brethren in Thessalonica, that Christ and God would “comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.” He then reverses his field and asks the brethren to pray for him and his fellow workers. “Finally, brethren,” he requests, “pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you” (II Thessalonians 3:1). This is one awesome request that should still be honored today. It would certainly be tremendously wonderful if the word of God would be heard and obeyed in a major way. It is interesting that the apostle pictures the gospel as running rapidly, spreading like wildfire through the masses of mankind. Regarding glorification: Jesus had made this statement, “By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:8). Hence when Paul prays that the word might be glorified, he is praying that its preaching would produce many disciples.
- **Delivered** - Basically the word of God has to be transmitted from person to person. There would be the extremely rare man in modern times who would be able to process the scriptures in such a manner that he would understand the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. But especially in the era in which the New Testament was being written, the only way a person could come to the true belief in Christ would be through the preaching and teaching of another individual. Thus, if Satan could block the progress of the messengers, he could block the progress of the gospel. Paul therefore continues his thought in asking for the prayers of the saints, “and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men, for not all have faith” (II Thessalonians 3:2). All Christians need to be conscious that there are those who are twisted, perverted individuals, who due to an anti-God sexual proclivity or for some other reason are totally against the doctrine of God. There are those who oppose the truth in a verbal, argumentative form, and there are those evil types who actually engage in physical intimidation and violence to shut the mouths of those who would call them and the world to repentance. Paul is clearly concerned enough about them to ask the brethren that he and his fellow teachers might be delivered from such.

God's earnest desire is that all men “come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:4). The sacred writings are clear that He does not wish “for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9). It would be a logical conclusion for modern saints to pray as well, “that the word of the Lord spread rapidly and be glorified,” and that modern teachers and preachers “be delivered from perverse and evil men.” It is true, that not all men have faith, nor do they have any intention of coming to believe in the faith system outlined by the new covenant writings.

Chapter 3:3-5 - The Lord Is Faithful

There are many songs speaking of the faithfulness of the Lord, and justifiably so. "If we are faithless," are the words of one of Paul's trustworthy statements, "He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself" (II Timothy 2:13). One of the tremendous and powerful qualities of God is His faithfulness; He can be counted upon to keep His word and His promises...and on time! It is certainly reassuring for example, for a saint who is defending the truths of the gospel and the way of salvation to know that "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). It is confidence-building to know that "if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (I John 5:14). How encouraging it is for Him to say, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

- **Protection** - The apostle had asked that the brethren pray that he might be delivered from perverse and evil men so that he could continue to preach the gospel. But evil men not only attacked the apostles, they opposed anyone who would proclaim Christ as the only Lord over all. Evil men often occupy positions of influence and authority, or have the ability to influence those who do. Hence at some point powerful forces work against those who teach the word of God, and the more visible the teachers, the more likely the pressure and persecution will come. "Is it not the rich who oppress you," James had asked, "and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?" (James 2:6,7). What defense, then, does the saint of God have against such rich and powerful forces? Not surprisingly, the Lord of Hosts comes to the rescue "But the Lord is faithful," explains the apostle Paul, "and He will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one" (II Thessalonians 3:3). The amazingly loving and totally dependable God has promised to strengthen the brethren in their faith, and to take steps to protect them - protection from evil men, and protection from the evil one. Properly understood, what earthly force or what power of Satan could possibly stand up against what the Lord offers His saints.
- **Confidence** - The scripture encourages God's people through the ages. "Be strong and very courageous," were the words of the Almighty Himself to Joshua (Joshua 1:7). Take courage," were words Jesus often used. "In the world you have tribulation," the Christ had spoken to the apostles in the night in which He was betrayed, "but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). "Strengthen your hearts." James had exhorted (James 5:8). And Paul had just prayed that God would "strengthen your hearts" in this epistle to the brethren in Thessalonica. So, it is not surprising that Paul would now say, "And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will do what we command" (II Thessalonians 3:4). What the apostle Paul and others had commanded was for the brethren to be faithful to the Lord and to continue to preach and teach the word of God in the face of every type of opposition.

Because of the perversity of evil men, because of the intensity of the persecution, and because of the temptations coming the way of the brethren, Paul thus prays: "And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ" (II Thessalonians 3:5). Jesus had made the statement concerning what happens when law and order breaks down, and chaos arises because of persecution. "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). The hearts of the disciples therefore would have to be directed into the love of God. Similarly, their hearts would have to be guided into that steadfastness of faith which comes from full commitment to Christ. God is faithful; He is working to produce that same characteristic in those who would be sons of the Father in heaven.

Chapter 3:6-8 - Unruly Lives

Satan is the original anarchist. Jude describes the rebellion that the outcast angel fomented amongst other angels in these terms: "And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day" (Jude 1:6). What had been orderly and harmonious was now disrupted, and rancor and disorder were introduced into the spiritual realm. Thus, even in Satan's realm (now the *Tartarus* of II Peter 2:4), hate and chaos reign. A picture is given in the apocalypse of John, "They [the forces of darkness] have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon" (Revelation 9:11). The devil is the great *destroyer*, even in his realm all is disorder. Hence it is that as the prince of darkness holds increasing sway over mankind, people and families fall into disorder and thence destruction. God, then, through the gospel, is calling mankind out of that darkness and disruption into His marvelous light and the productivity of His orderly existence.

- **Command about the unruly** - God is serious about His children's getting their lives, including their spending and work habits, under control. "Now we command you, brethren," comes the imperium from the apostle Paul, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (II Thessalonians 3:6). What is to follow, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is coming with the full authority of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. "...that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the *tradition* which you received from us." The apostle is describing a lifestyle that was handed down from the Lord through the apostles to all the rest of the brethren. When a man and his family were known to be living in an unruly manner, then the church was ordered to back away from close fellowship with them.
- **Finances** - One of the areas where God expects Christians to be disciplined is in the area of finances. Jesus had commented that if a person was not dependable in the use of what He called "unrighteous mammon, then that person could not be trusted in any other area either" (Luke 16:10,11). Thus the saint is instructed to have his finances in sufficient order to be able to pay his own way rather than trying to "freeload" - always finagling to have others pay the bills. "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example." Paul reminds the brethren, "because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it" (II Thessalonians 3:7,8). The area of *finances* is a large one, but in simple terms the individual needs to have a means of income, and he needs to manage that income so that he can pay for his own bread and whatever other living expenses he incurs. Or else!

In order for brethren to get their lives and spending under control, they need to develop structure. One of the great things God has done for those who He called His people has been to provide structure for them. For the early Israelites, He provided them with the weekly Sabbath to observe as a day of rest. Of course, Israel stubbornly refused to come under that discipline and structure, so God destroyed all but a remnant. For the remnant in Judah who survived, God allowed the meeting in the synagogue to be added for the observance of the Sabbath, wherein the reading of the law and the prophets was carried out publically on a weekly basis. More structure was thus provided for the remaining Israelites, which helped them develop discipline in the other areas. Similarly, for modern saints, God has provided the regular assembly of the Christians on the first day of the week and at other appointed times. This is where the new Saint must begin, setting the assemblies of the church as his first and highest priority. Until he develops this discipline, it will be very difficult to develop other required disciplines as well.

Chapter 3:9 - The Apostles' Example

The easiest way to learn how to perform a task is by watching someone skilled accomplish said task. Hence, when it comes to the Christian lifestyle, God had the apostles model the lifestyle, so that first century brethren had visible examples to follow, from which modern saints can glean the necessary information as to how they should live also. This lifestyle, patterned after the life of Jesus, is called "the tradition which you received from us." "You yourselves know how you ought to follow our example." states Paul, "because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you." The apostle and those with him managed their finances, as he pointed out: "We did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it."

- **Labor and hardship** - It takes discipline to provide money for the household. When the apostle speaks of how he and those with him paid their way, he recalls, "with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you." The words "labor" and "hardship" create the clear picture that work is not always fun and games, but that challenges to the body and mind arise. The discipline of showing up and working every day - just like showing up at the appointed assemblies every week - develop a character of discipline that is necessary for other aspects of the successful Christian life. Also his expression that he and those with him did not want to "be a burden to any of you" bespeaks their example of being givers rather than takers, of edifiers rather than users.
- **Their model** - The apostle and his companions were trying to teach these brethren, raised in the midst of Greek society (or Jewish society with a lot of Greek influence) how to live disciplined and productive lives. The Greeks were pagans, they were definitely immoral, and they tended to live in a scattered rather than a focused fashion. Needing direction and mentors, the men with Paul did not burden the brethren with any necessity of financing their teaching and preaching, as Paul says, "not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example" (II Thessalonians 3:9). The apostle had made it clear to other congregations that those who labor in the word have "the right" to glean a financial living off their labors for the Lord. "The plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops, Paul had commented to the Corinthian brethren, using the example of laboring on the farm. "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?" he further queried rhetorically. He then followed up with this blockbuster statement: "The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:10-14). Even though, then, Paul and other laborers had "the right" to accept some financial return for their labors, in the midst of this somewhat slack Greek Society, they did not use that right, choosing rather to work in addition to preaching to offer themselves as a model - showing what it means to implement the Biblical work ethic.

The problem was entrenched in the society, such as it was at the time. "Now we hear, says he, with presumably fairly trustworthy sources, that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies" (II Thessalonians 3:11). There are always some who are lazy, always figuring out how to scam others and profit off of their labor. Laziness and a slack lifestyle are clearly unchristian, and anyone making a claim to sainthood in Christ who lives in this way needs to face himself. Also he needs to face a very basic concept connected with serving God from ancient times: repentance!

Chapter 3:10-12 - No Working, No Eating

God's earnest desire is that the spiritual children who bear and represent His name live a disciplined, orderly lifestyle. God Himself is disciplined and orderly. The planets and various moons in the solar system move in very precise orbits; their paths are mathematical and their locations can be predicted with amazing precision. This orderliness is an exhibition of the character of the Creator, as was noted by Paul in his epistle to the Roman Christians. "For since the creation of the of Christ world," were his words, "His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). His orderly character is one of the things on display by the creation. God is also disciplined, one exhibition of which is His ability to do things on time. "At the right time," noted the apostle Paul, "Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). Those, then, that desire to be the sons of their Father in heaven will be imitators of His discipline and orderliness.

- **Necessity of work** - One of the disasters of the modern digital age is how video games have replaced the games played on the field or on the court by vast numbers of children. It is a simple fact: virtual reality is not reality - reeving on a joystick is not the same as pushing the body down the hardwood. Hence the toughness needed to discipline the body for real life is lost to a generation who will give up when the going gets tough. Of course, the tendency of the race of man to go for the easy way rather than the right way is nothing new. "We hear," Paul had stated, "that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all." This is not good for God's spiritual children, since such lack of discipline is essentially ungodliness. "For even when we were with you," the apostle reminds them, "we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat" (II Thessalonians 3:10). Given the choice of working God works, and or starving, the able-bodied man will finally work. "A worker's appetite works for him," is wisdom s from the sage of Proverbs, "for his hunger urges him on" (Proverbs 16:26). Necessity may be the mother of invention, but it certainly is the father of motivation.
- **Eat your own bread** - God wants His spiritual children to be partakers of His divine nature, to be givers rather than takers. Hence He wants those whom He is calling out of the darkness into the light of His glorious character to lay aside old undisciplined ways, and walk orderly before Him. "For we hear," is Paul's comment, "that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies" (II Thessalonians 3:11). Dad in heaven is not going to let that pass! The instruction is issued through the apostles, coming in this case through Paul: "Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread" (II Thessalonians 3:12). The message is clear: quit the gossip and idle chatter ["quiet fashion"], get off the chair or off the couch ["work"], and quit freeloading off other people ["eat your own bread"].

God started the creation with His work. "On the seventh day," say the ancient records, "God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done" (Genesis 2:2). As the One who worked, and is working, He is well within His character rights to expect that those who are called by His name be exemplary workers also. He is orderly and disciplined, and He is right to expect that those making a claim to godliness will be orderly and disciplined also. Christian men and women need to "listen up": get rid of any lazy bones, work hard, and be disciplined in the management of time and finances. Or else!

Chapter 3:13-15 - Attitude Adjustments

Life on this planet is full of challenges in the physical realm, to say nothing of challenges which might arise in the directly spiritual sphere. "For we know," asserted the apostle Paul, "that the whole creation groans and suffers with the pains of childbirth together until now" (Romans 8:22). The second law of thermodynamics was unflinchingly imposed upon all creation by the wisdom of an Almighty God, establishing clearly that the law of decay and death is constantly in operation. Christians, therefore, do not get to escape the ravages of that law during their existence in the physical realm. "Also we ourselves," was his observation, "having the first fruits of the Spirit [the indwelling presence of the Spirit], even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body our resurrection from the dead" (Romans 8:23). Because of the nature of this struggle in all aspects of Christian living, there can be attitude challenges to overcome.

- **No let up** - The Christian life is compared to a long run. "Let us run with endurance," exhorted Hebrews' author, "the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). Under those conditions, a weariness can set in, and the individual then be persuaded to quit. The sacred scriptures always encourage the brethren to power through those moments, and keep a great attitude and a high level of performance. Thus, as the apostle Paul discusses the importance of saints' maintaining discipline and orderliness in the midst of an unorganized and slovenly society, he brings forth exhortation to assist them in the long race. "But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good" (II Thessalonians 3:13). This is a theme that runs through new covenant writings - not getting weary in the midst of doing good for brethren and the lost. Ultimately, all things are to be done for Christ, the consciousness of which will prevent a lot of the tendency toward weariness. So when the saint is working hard, doing good things for God and for the church, and no one notices, there is no room for getting tired of it and just quitting. When there is no thanks, or seemingly no results, kick weariness aside. When it seems that no one wants to listen, or if they are consistently hostile or indifferent to the truth, and the thought comes to "throw in the towel," eliminate that thought and focus on Christ and His reward. Keep working in quiet fashion, keep eating your own bread, keep being a good example, and keep imitating the example of Jesus, as well as Paul and the other apostles.
- **What if?** - So what if one of the saints in the local congregation doesn't follow these instructions from the sacred writ? What if he gets a little stiff-necked, and makes comments such as, "You can't tell me how to run my life." What saith the Lord? "And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man, and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame" (II Thessalonians 3:14). There it is: if a man is a non-working freeloader, and he refuses to listen to the pleadings of the congregation to get it right in this sector of his life, then the congregation is to withdraw from associating or fellowshiping with him. "And yet," says the apostle, "do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (II Thessalonians 3:15). Once he shows some honest effort and consistent real improvement, then the doors of fellowship are to be swung wide open for him.

The Lord clearly is committed to having his saints' exhibit orderly and disciplined lives to the world. They are to make the necessary attitude adjustments to be shining examples of those who work hard, who do things right, who manage their finances properly, and who set the right priorities. May each of the modern brethren implement these things in his life and the life of his family. And may the Lord be glorified by that example in the midst of a darkening world.

Chapter 3:16-18 - Coming to a Close

The apostle Paul really cared for the brethren in Thessalonica. The love of God indeed had been poured out within his heart, and he earnestly desired their proper eternity. Hence he was willing to bare his soul before the brethren, and in all sincerity to implore them to make necessary changes in their lives and outlooks. Therefore, when it came time for him to close this epistle, his sincerity and love show through in the finishing lines; these were not merely standard closings, but appeals from his own pure heart.

- **God of peace** - Satan and his angels rebelled against God. As earth was created, and man was placed on this planet to till the ground and husband his family, the outcast angel was able to persuade man to participate in that same rebellion. But God is peaceful and willing to reconcile; hence He sent Christ into the world to “extend the olive branch,” offering each individual forgiveness and reconciliation. This was not something He was obligated to do - it was what He chose to do as an exhibition of His character, that He is indeed “the Lord of peace.” Hence, as Paul closes this second epistle to the Thessalonians, he is going to reference that quality, and use that as a reminder of what God could do for this persecuted congregation. “Now may the Lord of peace Himself,” he appeals, “continually grant you peace in every circumstance” (II Thessalonians 3:16). Only the Lord of peace can give peace. And what a blessing it is for those who have come out of the realm of guilty consciences, anger, and total clamor and confusion to be able to come into the realm of the inner peace and calm which emanates from His very being. Another note: this is peace for every circumstance! This is appropriately followed with the prayer and the promise. “The Lord be with you all.” How blessed indeed is the Christian, if only he has faith enough to see it!
- **The mark of Paul** - As part of the discussion in this epistle, Paul pointed out that there was a possibility of false information coming from “a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us” (II Thessalonians 2:2). Since what is involved here are the words of eternal life, the twisting of those words is far more important than finding out someone hacked a company’s data or that someone’s earthly identity has been compromised. The apostle then lets the brethren know what an epistle from him has that would stand out from something fake. “I, Paul,” he emphasizes, “write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write” (II Thessalonians 3:17). God has always had ways of making sure that there is a distinction between His message and His messengers and the pretenders. The mark of Paul was one of those.
- **God's grace** - The apostles and early brethren recognized that without God's grace, there would be no redemption or blessing for the people of God. “The Law came through Moses,” was John's observation, “but grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). The customary close of epistles, then, sincerely invokes this grace upon the saints. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” prays Paul, “be with you all” (II Thessalonians 3:18).

This powerful, punchy epistle to the saints in Thessalonica certainly has its special place among the twenty-seven “books” of the New Testament writings. Herein we receive more information concerning the second coming of Christ and His judgment upon those who do not know God or obey His gospel. Herein we have the warnings about the developing lawlessness that would result in someone claiming to be the head of the temple of God, and “displaying himself as God.” Herein we are apprised of the necessity of Christians being hard workers, producers rather than consumers. And herein we receive the exhortation to stand firm in the lifestyle we were taught by the apostles, and to take major encouragement from the fact that God “has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope”!!