

2nd Thessalonians

"No Rest for the Wicked"

(2nd Thessalonians 1:1-12)

2nd Thessalonians Background: Paul's second letter to the Thessalonian church was written shortly after the first, probably within months of its delivery. It was authored by Paul while Silas and Timothy were with him in Corinth. The church is the same group of believers that had received the first letter. It may have been written based on the report of the one that delivered the first letter. The report included strengths of and challenges for the church. For instance, the church was continuing to grow even in light of significant persecutions. On the other hand, a false teaching concerning the Day of the Lord had entered the church and was causing confusion, leading some to quit their jobs and focus on preparing for the Lord's return. Paul wrote the letter to: (1) Commend their continuing in the faith, (2) Correct their doctrinal error about the Day of the Lord and (3) Warn of its consequences.

Some Context: Paul's first letter to the Church of the Thessalonians did not immediately solve all their problems. The persecutions grew worse, and some people thought that they were living in the time of the Tribulation. Then, a letter arrived claiming to be from Paul saying that they were already living in the Day of the Lord. The church was confused and frightened. Some believers even quit their jobs and spent their time waiting for the Lord, adding to the burden of an already over-burdened church. The church was in need of encouragement.

The Text: 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. ³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. ⁴ Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. ⁵ This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— ⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰ when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. ¹¹ To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, ¹² so 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. (ESV)

The Encouragement of Praise (1:1-4): Their faith was growing (v3a). Faith that is tested grows stronger. Paul had prayed that their faith might be perfected (1st Thess 3:10). Now Paul was giving thanks that they had grown strong in the faith. Their love was abounding (v3b). Faith reaches upward resulting in love reaching outward. Paul had prayed that their love might abound (1st Thess 3:12). Now Paul was giving thanks that their love for each other was increasing. Their patience was increasing (v4). Trials always work for us, not against us. If we trust God and yield to him, the trials in our lives will eventually produce patience and maturity. Paul was now boasting about their patience in the face of persecutions. Their testimony was helping others (v4.a). God encourages us that we may encourage others. Paul was now encouraging other churches with stories of the Thessalonian's continuation in the faith. Their faith was maturing, love was abounding; what about hope? They may have been confused about this, leading to the second encouragement.

The Encouragement of Promise (1:5-10): We tend to think that God doesn't see us or care about us when we are suffering, and the opposite is true. When we suffer for a season, this is a sign that God is working out his great plan for us. If he suffered, we who are with him will also experience suffering. We don't like it, but James encourages us to consider it joy. Three experiences are involved in the promises of God for his people: (1) Reward, (2) Recompense and (3) Rest. Regarding reward (v5): We are considered worthy of the Kingdom when we suffer. This is NOT because we need to "earn" our way into the Kingdom. We have secured that through faith in Christ. We suffer now because that is the way God chooses to operate. However, one day in the future, the Lord will turn the tables on the wicked. Regarding recompense (v6, 7b-9): God will repay affliction to the lost but rest to the saved. Christians must walk with eternity in mind and NOT necessarily the present. God repays "in kind" in his time. Regarding rest (v7a, 10): Rest is the opposite of judgment. The saints will receive rest in that they are caught up with Jesus at the rapture and have escaped the judgment when they return with him at the time of his second coming.

The Encouragement of Prayer (1:11-12): We see once again that Paul is all about praying for his converts. We saw this in 1st Thessalonians 1:2, and again in 1st Thessalonians 3:10. Now we see it again here. There were three concerns in Paul's prayer: (1) Their worthiness, (2) their walk and (3) their witness. Paul had previously stated that he wanted them to be worthy of the Kingdom and now he specifically prays for that. To be worthy is to be continually growing. If we are stagnant or backsliding, we are of limited value or have lost our value altogether. So, Paul prays that his converts will continue to be valuable assets to God. Paul was praying that God would continue to use his converts. Obedience and service do not come from the applied talents of men but from God's power as we trust him, or yield to him. Oftentimes, we don't know our value to God or think incorrectly that we are of no value. But God always uses his people to the extent that they avail themselves to him. For sure Jesus Christ will be glorified when he returns with his saints (2nd Thess 2:10). But Paul was praying that his converts would live in such a manner that they would glorify Jesus Christ in the here and now, before everyone that they rub shoulders with.

Calvary Bible Church and the Thessalonian Letters: The Constitution of the Calvary Bible Church (CBC) makes reference to 2nd Thessalonians 1:7-9 in support of its Statement of Doctrinal Beliefs as recorded in Article III.O.3. Regarding the "Eternal State" the statement reads: "*We believe that the souls of unbelievers remain after death in conscious misery until the second resurrection, when body and soul reunited shall appear at the Great White Throne Judgment, and shall be cast into the Lake of Fire, not to be annihilated, but to suffer everlasting conscious punishment.*" As you can see, we believe that is NOT temporary nor is it annihilation. It will be eternal separation from the presence of God.

Next Week: "God's Timetable" (2nd Thessalonians 2:1-12)