

SUFFER PERSECUTION WITH HOPE

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

The book of 2 Thessalonians was written by Paul from the city of Corinth just a short while after the writing of 1 Thessalonians, perhaps two or three months. It is likely that the messenger, who carried 1 Thessalonians to the church, had returned to Paul with more news about the church, and Paul in response to this information, penned this second letter.

The epistle itself reflects that Paul had received both favorable and unfavorable news about the Thessalonian Christians. In chapter one Paul expresses his thanksgiving concerning their steadfast faith in the midst of persecutions and encourages them in the light of the second coming of Christ to remain steadfast.

In chapters two and three Paul deals with two problems that were reported to exist in the church. Both of these problems had been anticipated by Paul and he had warned against them when he wrote his first letter to them, but by the time of his second letter the problem had grown considerably and needed to be dealt with explicitly and definitively. The first of these problems was the misapprehension concerning the Day of the Lord. Some had beguiled the church with a spurious letter from Paul to believe that the severe persecutions they were enduring were the judgments of the Tribulation. Thus they were already in the Day of the Lord. Paul, therefore, carefully explains in chapter two exactly what must take place before the Day of the Lord could come. Secondly, in chapter three, Paul exhorts the church to deal with those who became fanatical about Christ's return and used it as an excuse not to work.

Thus our lesson in chapters one and two centers around two subjects: (1) encouragement in the midst of persecutions, and (2) explanation concerning the Day of the Lord.

I. Thanksgiving for Spiritual Development — 1:1-4

1:1 — "Silvanus and Timothy" - These two men were companions of Paul on his second missionary journey. Silvanus is called Silas in Acts and he was one of two chief men that Paul met in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:22). Silas and the other man traveled with Paul to bring a message from the church in Jerusalem to the church in Antioch. After they delivered their message, Silas decided to stay in Antioch (Acts 15:30-34). God was leading Silas to serve Him on the mission field. Shortly afterward, Paul chose Silas to go with him as a fellow missionary (Acts 15:40). In Philippi he suffered a beating and imprisonment with Paul for casting a demon from a girl, but God used that imprisonment during the night to bring salvation to the Philippian jailor and his family (Acts 16:16-34). When Paul arrived in Derbe and Lystra, he found Timothy, a young man he had led to Christ on his first missionary journey, and asked him to join them (Acts 16:1-3). Luke, the author of Acts, also joined Paul.

1:2 — "Grace and peace" - These are gifts of God to believers. Paul wanted the believers at Thessalonica to experience these gifts to the fullest. Salvation from eternity in Hell to live with God forever was made possible by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. He gave His life for us as ungodly sinners that were His enemies (Rom 5:6, 8, 10). This gift is undeserved, but God offers it to us freely. That is the gift of grace.

The wrath of God is on all of us due to our sins against Him, but the Lord Jesus Christ satisfied His wrath by paying the full penalty for all of our sins. All we must do is repent of our sins, accept Christ's payment for them by faith with a grateful heart and God's wrath against us is gone. This is the gift of peace.

1:3 — The word "bound" comes from a verb which means "to owe." Paul views this thanksgiving as a debt owed to God. He gives two reasons for his thanksgiving: (1) their faith was growing exceedingly (overflowing, beyond natural expectations); and (2) their love was abounding toward each other.

1:4 — Their growth in patience and faith was such that Paul could boast of them among the churches. Their faith and their ability to endure persecutions were closely connected.

"Endure" — literally means "to hold up" under persecutions. The church had held up under the persecution from Jews and fellow countrymen since the beginning and was still holding its faith in the Lord.

II. Tribulation upon Their Unsaved Persecutors — 1:5-10

1:5 — Their endurance in persecutions is a plain indication of the righteous judgment of God on their persecutors. In other words, their faith, proved genuine by trials, became evidence to the unsaved that their message was genuine and would, therefore, be vindicated by God. Their endurance was a warning that they were harming God's children.

1:6 — God is righteous to recompense righteous judgment on those harming His children. This judgment is fair, because sin is against the very nature of God. It must be punished. This is the basis for all morality. If the wicked can escape punishment for his sin, then there is no morality. Every man can do what is right in his own eyes.

1:7 — Furthermore, God is righteous to bless His children with eternal rest who are being persecuted. Notice that Paul included himself with those who would receive rest or relief from his sufferings when the Lord comes in His glory to establish His Kingdom on earth. Peter has a sure word of comfort for those that suffer. He said, "If you are reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you; for the spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1 Pet 4:14). God will give special care and comfort now to those that suffer for His name.

"When the Lord shall be revealed from Heaven" — The revelation of the Lord is not the Rapture when Jesus Christ will come for the Church believers, give them new bodies like His (1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 Cor 15:51-54), will meet them in the air (1 Thess 4:17) before the Tribulation (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rev 3:10) and take them to His Father's house in Heaven (Jn 14:1-3). The revelation of the Lord is when Jesus Christ will come at the end of the Tribulation with His Church Bride (Rev 19:7-9) to destroy Satan's kingdom and rule the earth for 1000 years (Jude 14; Rev 2:26-27; 19:14; 20:4a, 6)).

"His mighty angels" — A more accurate translation would be, "the angels of His might." This shows that the angels are receiving their power from the Lord. They have no power apart from the Lord.

1:8 — "In flaming fire" - The fire should not be considered the weapon of the angels, but the divine glory of the Lord. This pictures His divine majesty and blazing indignation against sin (cf Ex 3:2; Ps 18:12; Dan 7:9-10). It is another affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ.

The people who are the objects of this vengeance are described as (1) those that know not God" and (2) those that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." An implied contrast may be intended here. The former class refers to the heathen that have never heard the Gospel, but only knew about God through creation and conscience (Rom 1-2; cf. 1 Thess 4:5). The latter class refers to those who heard the Gospel, but consciously rejected its message that Jesus was the only Savior from their sins and refused to obey Him as their Lord. These would be the Jews among whom Paul first worked and preached the Gospel in their synagogue for three weeks. It would also be those Gentiles that heard the Gospel after Paul left the synagogue and preached in their city.

It is not enough to hear the Gospel and even believe it. The Gospel needs to be obeyed to be effective in saving a sinner. Belief is not a passive acceptance but an active repentance from sin, and obedient faith in Jesus Christ as Lord (cf. Rom 16:26, 1 Pet 1:22; 4:17).

1:9 — "Punished" - This word comes from the same word as "righteous" and indicates righteous judgment determined by a lawful process. It is punishment firmly rooted and grounded in what is right.

"Everlasting destruction" — These words are the strongest words that Paul ever used regarding the punishment of those that reject the Gospel of salvation by Jesus Christ. Eternal destruction is the exact opposite of eternal life; both are eternal. If eternal destruction is changed, it changes the meaning of eternal life. If eternal destruction is interpreted to be eternal annihilation, it removes the deterrent to sin: "Let us sin to the fullest, because we will be annihilated when we die." It also removes the blessing of eternal life, because eternal no longer means eternal. Eternal life is only for this life and will not exist when we die.

1:10 — When Jesus comes, He will be glorified in the believers by the work that He has done in their lives through salvation, sanctification and glorification. Believers will finally be like Him when they see Him in glory (1 Jn 3:2-3). But even more, He will be praised and exalted by the believers when they enter into His glorious Kingdom on earth.

III. Supplication for Their Divine Responsibilities — 1:11-12

1:11 — "Therefore" - This could be rendered "unto this end," or "with this goal in view." Paul prays that they would live worthy of their glorious calling which is described in v. 10 (cf. v. 5).

"Fulfill" — It is Paul's prayer that God would bring the church in Thessalonica to a successful conclusion. The church started out well and he wanted them to finish well, so they would be worthy to enjoy all the blessing of living in Christ's Kingdom on earth.

"Work of faith with power" — Paul prays that God will undertake in power to perform in them their spiritual aspirations and work.

1:12 — The ultimate aim of every Christian should be the glorification of the name of Jesus Christ. When this is done, He returns the favor and glorifies him or her. This is done by the grace of God and Lord Jesus Christ.