

2 Thessalonians

Historical Context, Authorship, and Dating

This epistle contains evidence that Paul had recently heard news about current conditions in the Thessalonian church. Probably most of this information came to him from the person who had carried 1 Thessalonians to its recipients and had returned to Paul at Corinth. The majority of the Thessalonians were continuing to grow and to remain faithful to Christ in spite of persecution. False teaching concerning the day of the Lord had entered the church and was causing confusion and leading some of the Christians to quit their jobs in expectation of the Lord's return.

In view of these reports Paul evidently felt constrained to write this epistle. Almost all conservative scholars believe that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians from Corinth. The basis for this conclusion is that Paul, Silas, and Timothy were present together in Corinth (Acts 18:5). Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth. The topics he treated in the second epistle seem to grow out of situations he alluded to in the first. They reflect a very similar situation in the Thessalonian church. Corinth, therefore, seems the probable site of composition of 2 Thessalonians.

It appears that Paul composed 2 Thessalonians quite soon after 1 Thessalonians, perhaps within 12 months. This would place the date of composition in the early A.D. 50s, perhaps A.D. 51.

Purpose

Three purposes are evident from the contents of the epistle. 1) Paul wrote to encourage the Thessalonian believers to continue to persevere in the face of continuing persecution (1:3-10). 2) He also wanted to clarify events preceding the day of the Lord to dispel false teaching (2:1-12). 3) He instructed the church how to deal with Christians who didn't want to work (3:6-15).

Greetings (1:1-2)

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

- Ancient letters almost always began with the formulation of the sender to the addressee, followed by a greeting. Paul used this formula, with some elaborations, after 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
- **Paul** -- in his pre-Christian life, he was known as Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the Christians (Acts 7:58). In his conversion on the road to Damascus, Christ addressed him as Saul (Acts 9:4). For the next nine years of his Christian life, he continued using the name Saul (Acts 9:17). At the beginning of his first missionary journey, he began to go by Paul (Acts 13:9). On his missionary journeys, Paul usually was accompanied by his associates.
- **Silvanus** – also called Silas, traveled with Paul on his second missionary journey and was imprisoned and set free with Paul in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:19-24). When Paul first came to Thessalonica, Silas, known as Silvanus, came with him (Acts 17:1-9).
- **Timothy** -- a resident of Lystra, a city in the province of Galatia (Acts 16:1-3). He was the son of a Greek father (Acts 16:2) and a Jewish mother named Eunice (2 Timothy 2:5). He had been taught the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother from his youth (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). Timothy was a trusted companion of Paul, and had accompanied Paul on many of his missionary journeys. Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians on a previous occasion (1 Thessalonians 3:2).
- **To the church of the Thessalonians** – The term church, *ekklēsia*, commonly designated the popular governing assembly of free citizens in a Greek city such as Corinth or Athens (Acts 19:32). In the LXX the term *ekklēsia* designated the assembly of Yahweh, the called out ones, the people of God (Deut. 9:10). *Ekklēsia* could refer to the totality of the Christian community in a city (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:2) or to the basic group that met in the

house of one of the members (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19). On rare occasions it could designate the totality of the Christian community in any and every place (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18).

- Here it is a descriptive genitive, meaning, “To the church located in Thessalonica”.
- Paul had founded this church on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9). He had been imprisoned in Philippi and then miraculously freed from jail prior to being forced out of the city. Then he came to Thessalonica, located on the famous Egnatian Way (Acts 16:11-40). He taught in the synagogues for only three Sabbaths before having problems with the Jews. Although Acts leads one to believe that Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica at this point, his own writings make it seem that he remained in the city for a number of weeks or months, ministering primarily among the Gentiles (1 Thess. 2:9; cf Phil. 4:15-16).
- **In God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** – Paul placed Jesus Christ at the level of equality with God the Father. **Lord** in the LXX was used to translate Adonai, which was used in the Old Testament to refer to Yahweh. **Christ** is the Greek translation for Messiah, the Anointed.
- The only difference between this ascription and that found in 1 Thess 1:1 is the inclusion of the description of **God as our Father**.
- The designation of **God as our Father** draws the Thessalonian believers into one family and joins them together with Paul and with the world wide church.

1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- **Grace to you and peace** -- Paul combines the Greek concept of **grace** with the Jewish concept of shalom, **peace**.
- **Grace** is God’s unmerited favor, which He has bestowed on believers, apart from any merit of their own, and at a time when they deserved nothing except his condemnation.
- **Peace** is a result of receiving God’s grace. Once a person has received grace from God, he is able to enjoy true peace both with God and with mankind. The concept of shalom, peace, is not just absence from hostility, but also being in a position to enjoy the totality of God’s blessings.
- These divine benefits proceed not only from **God our Father** but also, together with Him, from **the Lord Jesus Christ**.
- As the Thessalonian believers stand against every kind of adversity, whether in life or in death, they can rest in the security of receiving **grace and peace ... from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**.

Thanksgiving (1:3-4)

1:3 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.

- 2 Thessalonians begins with a thanksgiving to God for the church, as does the first letter to this congregation (1 Thess 1:3ff).
- These words inform the believers of the apostles’ thanksgiving to God for them, but also add that offering such thanksgiving is a duty or obligation, **we ought**, *opheilomen*.
- The phrase **as is right** adds that such thanksgiving to God is also fitting and proper, *axios*, precisely because we owe God such honor (cf 1 Thess. 2.12).
- Paul recognized the necessity of offering thanksgiving to God for the growing faith and love demonstrated by this church (v. 3b).
- The reality of the Thessalonians’ faith and love moves Paul to offer thanks.
- In describing how their **faith is growing abundantly**, Paul employs a verb that is found only here in the NT, an intensive form of “grow”. *Hyperauxanein* refers to an internal, organic growth, as of a tree.
- Paul is thankful for the flourishing faith and increasing love.
- Paul had previously exhorted the church to exhibit love toward one another “more and more” (1 Thess 4:10) and had even prayed that their “love [might] increase and overflow for each other” (1 Thess 3:12, which uses the same verb found here, *pleonazō*, “to increase abundantly”).

- **Faith** refers in part to the inward or spiritual growth, but **love** refers to the outward manifestation of care and concern for each other.
- This Christian love was exhibited by **every one of you for one another**.

1:4 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.

- **Therefore**, *hōste*, at the beginning of v. 4 introduces a result clause.
- The faith and love of the Thessalonians has resulted in Paul's boasting about them to other Christians, especially about their **steadfastness and faith** through many trials.
- Here again Paul uses a compound verb, *enkauchasthai*, indicating boasting in something or someone specific, in this case the Thessalonians.
- The linking of **steadfastness** with *pistis*, faith, suggests that Paul has in mind **faithfulness** rather than just faith (1 Thess 3:5).
- The term *diogmois* focuses on external persecutions, while *thlipsesin* refers to trials of various sorts.
- Together they refer not only to outward pressure to conform, but probably also to real persecution.
- The final clause **that you are enduring** indicates clearly that the situation has not improved since Paul left or wrote 1 Thessalonians; however, they are **enduring**.

The Judgment of Christ's Coming (1:5-12)

1:5 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—

- Verse 5 begins with the word *endeigma*, which can be translated "sign", "indication", "guarantee", "proof", or "evidence".
- This precise word is found nowhere else in the New Testament.
- Although it is difficult to be certain of Paul's intent here, the sense of the verse is: "Here is evidence of the just judgment of God ..."
- The sufferers need some sort of reassurance that God's justice will in due course be done and they will be vindicated.
- The **evidence** Paul is referring to is for the long-suffering believer, and not a sign to unbelievers.
- Paul speaks of these Thessalonians as those who are deemed **worthy** by God of participating in the coming reign of God on earth.
- *Kataxiiothai* here, as in Luke 20:35, likely has a passive sense, referring to how God thinks of someone.
- It is for nothing less than the full establishment of God's perfect will and righteous reign on earth that the Thessalonians suffer, and as such should be an honor.
- They are deemed **worthy** because they have manifested the character of those whom Paul says will be able to inherit, enter, or obtain **the kingdom of God** (Gal 5:21; 1 Cor 6:9–10).
- In Acts 14:22 we are told that *through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*.
- There may well have been some in Thessalonica who saw their current severe suffering as evidence that the day of the Lord had passed them by.

1:6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

- A simple contrast is indicated in vv. 6–7, first the lost then the saved, and then further in vv. 8–9, where the fate of the lost is enunciated and then contrasted with those mentioned in v. 10 as saved. This is as stark a depiction of what happens on judgment day.

- Paul uses the conditional particle *eiper* at the beginning of v. 6 because it indicates something that should be seen as unmistakably true, meaning “if (as is the fact)” or **since**.
- For Paul here, God’s justice or judgment involves both vindication and vengeance.
- The God whom Paul is describing is a God who does offer love and reconciliation to His enemies, but if they refuse this offer and continue in opposition to His goodness and love, then eventually, having refused His mercy, they must face His justice.
- God’s judgment is redemptive, in that the same act in which He judges those who afflict believers He also vindicates the afflicted.

1:7 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

- The God who will repay the tormentors will also give rest or **grant relief** to the Thessalonians and to Paul.
- *Anesis* is not **relief** or “rest” in the normal sense of that word, but rather relief from suffering, as in 2 Cor. 2:13.
- This **relief**, however, is not in the present but will come at Christ’s return, **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven**.
- Until then, believers may expect tribulation and suffering to continue.
- The return of Christ is described as Jesus being **revealed, apokalypsis, from heaven with his mighty angels**. **Revealed** is used in the same sense of the parousia, meaning that Jesus will be clearly visible.
- For Paul, the day of Yahweh has become the day of the Lord Jesus.
- Christ is coming **with his mighty angels**, probably who was meant by “all his holy ones” in 1 Thess. 3:13, interpreting Zech 14:5.

1:8 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.

- Jesus is also returning “in fire of flame.”
- The same phrase is used to describe the burning bush in Acts 7:30, referring to a theophany.
- This verse emphasizes the result of Jesus’ return for unbelievers: namely **vengeance, ekdikesis**.
- Judgment is reserved not just for persecutors of Christians but for all **those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus**.
- We do not have here two groups of people, but rather two phrases in synonymous parallelism, the second phrase adding to and building on the first, as in Ps. 36:10.
- Paul is thinking not about people who are merely ignorant of God and the gospel.
- Rather he is thinking of those who ignore God, refusing to acknowledge Him, and who, at least having heard it or about it, disobey the gospel.
- In the end those punished are punished because of the way they have responded to God and His salvation, not merely because of how they have responded to some believers.

1:9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

- This verse makes clear the eternal consequences of God’s judgment.
- It begins with the Greek word *hoitines* which refers to the group of people just referred to who ignore God and reject the gospel.
- Here Paul’s phrase **from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might** comes straight over from the LXX of Isa 2:10, “from the face of the fear of the Lord and from the glory of his might”, which appears in Isaiah’s “Day of the Lord” oracle of judgment against Judah.
- For those who reject God and the gospel the penalty is *olethron aiōnion*, eternal punishment.

- Eternal destruction, then, is the opposite of eternal life and means everlasting or perpetual ruin, not annihilation.
- Although many object to this concept, Paul's language here is mild, as he does not relish nor dwell on descriptions of the damned and their pains, but rather describes their condition and eternal separation from God and God's people.

1:10 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.

- The presence, glorious appearance, and might of the returning Christ is for the lost judgment, but have a very different effect on the saved: glorification, perfection, and transformation into Christ's likeness.
- The phrase that Jesus **comes on that day to be glorified in his saints** comes from Ps 88:8 LXX, where it is said of God "being gloried in the council of the saints" and **to be marveled at among all who have believed** comes from Ps 67:36 LXX "marvelous is God among his holy ones."
- Paul wants to emphasize that eternal exclusion from God's presence is the long-term consequence for one group and the eternal dwelling in the presence of God and of His blessing for the other.
- Those who want to ignore and be separated from God in this life will continue to be so in the next, and those who long to obey God and to be in His presence in this life will do so forever in the next. In each case the outcome is appropriate and fits the response in this lifetime.
- When Jesus comes, He comes **to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.**
- The phrase **to be glorified in his saints** could mean 1) that the saints reflect Jesus' glory in their lives, 2) that He will be glorified in their presence, or 3) that the saints will glorify Jesus when He comes. The third seems most likely here, since the parallel clause speaks of something believers do, **marvel** at the Lord.
- The phrase **on that day** goes with both phrases, emphasizing the timing when this glorifying and marveling will take place, and is likely an echo of Isa 2:11.
- The *hoti* clause **because our testimony to you was believed** is parenthetical, reminding the Thessalonians that Paul's witness about Jesus was believed by them when he was present.
- The misplacement of this clause gives a hint that Paul is dictating here and that the scribe does not correct Paul but simply writes it down as Paul speaks.

1:11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,

- One of the more effective ways of changing behavior is to let people overhear one's prayers for them.
- Paul wants them to be persuaded that they must continue to behave faithfully and with endurance so that one day they will be counted worthy to be included in God's dominion.
- He wants them to desire to **fulfill every resolve for good** and asks that God will empower them to fulfill **every work of faith.**

1:12 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.

- Paul wants **the name of our Lord Jesus** to continue to **be glorified** by them and through their conduct.
- By taking **the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified** from Isa 66:5 LXX "the name of the Lord might be glorified", Paul once again takes the LXX name *kurios*, Lord, for Yahweh and attaches it to Jesus.
- While Christ is absent in heaven, it is His name which is glorified on earth, but it will be His person which is glorified when He returns.
- Paul concludes the prayer by making clear that none of this is possible except by **the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ** being active not only at the point of initial salvation but throughout the Christian life.

The Man of Lawlessness (2:1-12)

Paul next dealt with a doctrinal error that had come into the Thessalonian church in order to correct this error. Verses 1-23 contain truth about the end times revealed nowhere else in Scripture. This section is key to understanding future events, and it is central to the argument of this epistle.

The primary purpose of this passage is to reassure these believers that **the day of the Lord** has not yet come (2:2). Paul reminds them of some things that he had previously taught them regarding a prior appearance of **the mystery of lawlessness** and of **the man of lawlessness**. With his coming, **the Lord Jesus** will return to destroy him.

2:1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers,

- The argument which begins here at 2:1 starts with an appeal rather than an exhortation or a command.
- Here Paul immediately reminds the readers about something he has clearly spoken of before, which is the parousia and the gathering of the believers to Christ at His coming. These subjects were addressed in 1 Thessalonians 5 and 4 respectively.
- Compare the use of *episynagogēs*, which refers to a gathering together of a community, to the use of the verbal form of the word in Mark 13:27 and Matt 24:31, where it refers to the gathering together of the believers at the coming of the Son of Man.
- Paul is alluding to 1 Thess 4:17 and so is speaking of the same event as he spoke of there, which is the second coming of Christ.
- Paul links **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ** and their **being gathered together to him** as almost a single event, as they share one article: “the coming and gathering.”

2:2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

- The problem is a claim that Paul had taught that **the day of the Lord** has already occurred.
- Both here and in Gal. 1:6 Paul is concerned with a sudden, *taxeōs*, departure by young converts from the truth of some aspect of the gospel.
- Paul assumes that one of three sorts of communication might be responsible for the Thessalonians being unsettled by purporting that Paul had been teaching that the day of the Lord had already come either via: 1) a prophetic word, 2) an oral message, or 3) a letter.
- It appears that Paul is not sure where this misinformation has come from, nor why this has occurred.
- The question that arises is whether we should understand that **the day of the Lord** *enestēken* **has come** or “is near or imminent.”
- It seems clear from its use here that Paul does not just mean something that is near, so here the sense is **has already come**.
- The Thessalonians most likely understood **the day of the Lord** not as a literal twenty-four hour day but as the final period of time culminating in the coming of the Lord Jesus.
- They may have spiritualized the notion of the second coming and the coming resurrection, and deduced from all their sufferings that they must have missed this blessing.
- Rather than spiritualizing things, they may have simply thought that their current sufferings were part of the **day of the Lord**, and that Jesus’ coming must then be imminent, all being part of the final events.

2:3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

- Paul’s chief concern is that his converts not be led astray by this mistaken notion of the day of the Lord having already come.

- We have here an anacoluthon or incomplete sentence ***unless the rebellion comes first.***
- The rest of the sentence would read something like ***that day will not come.***
- *Apostasia* normally refers to a political or military revolt, but in the LXX it can refer to a revolt against or apostasy from the one true God (Josh 22:22).
- Paul does not more fully explain what he means by the apostasy or rebellion, suggesting that he said something to his converts before on this subject; perhaps along the lines with the apocalyptic discourse in Mark 13.
- Paul assumes that believers will be present when ***the rebellion*** or “apostasy” hits.
- It is not certain whether Paul is referring to one event (apostasy brought on by the appearance of the Lawless One), or a series of events (first rebellion, then the Lawless One appears), though it is clear that Paul understands that both of these events must precede the parousia of Jesus.
- Favoring the view that there are two eschatological events is the parallel construction using two different verbs: ***the rebellion comes, but the man of lawlessness is revealed.***
- There are some interesting parallels between this text and Psalms of Solomon 17:11–22, which refers to Pompey’s campaign in Judea in 63 BC, and refers to him as “the lawless one” whose actions result in Jewish apostasy.
- It is quite possible that Paul has in view some future ruler who will recapitulate the sins of Antiochus Epiphanes, Pompey, and Caligula and perhaps even lead some Jews astray.

2:4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

- Here Paul provides us with echoes of Dan 11:36, where the pagan king (possibly representing Antiochus Epiphanes) tries to exalt himself in the Temple of the one true God.
- The degree of his arrogance is shown in the Greek word *hyperairomenos*, which means “hyper-exalting oneself.”
- While Daniel has “over every god,” Paul has ***against every so-called god or object of worship.***
- Self-deification is seen in the adversary sitting down in the inner sanctum, the holy of holies, in the Temple of God.
- Here we are to think of the ultimate defilement of the Temple of God, such as that accomplished by Antiochus Epiphanes and attempted by Caligula.
- The deification of the Roman emperor is likely to supply some of the imagery here, though Daniel’s broader reference to any pagan ruler is also alluded to.
- It seems hard to overestimate the distress it caused Jews when Caligula attempted to have his statue set up in the Temple in Jerusalem, which only failed due to his untimely death.
- Another episode is that of Herod Agrippa I in AD 44 receiving divine honors in Caesarea Maritima, being acclaimed the voice and appearance of god, and being struck down (Acts 12:21–23).
- Paul is speaking to largely Gentile readers, and they will surely hear him as referring to an actual temple, in this case the Temple of the one true God that still stood in Jerusalem.

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

- This is simply a reminder that Paul spoke about some of these matters when he was with them.
- Paul refers back to his original oral teaching, not back to 1 Thessalonians.
- By going back to the original oral teaching, Paul goes around anything the Thessalonians might have heard about these matters in the interim.

2:6 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.

- Paul here refers to a restrainer who is exercising restraining force, holding back the Adversary.
- Here the reference is to something, *to katechon* (neuter), the restraining force.

- In v. 7 Paul will refer to the person who is doing the restraining, *ho katechon* (masculine).
- Paul told the Thessalonians about this person when he was with them, and so, although we are not sure, they should remember.
- The New Testament understands many events to occur at a divinely appointed time.

2: 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. “

- **For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work** and precedes the appearing of the man of lawlessness, who is being held back from appearing by the Restrainer.
- *Mystērion* here surely has the sense of something hidden from plain sight but nonetheless present and at work.
- However, the term **mystery** was also commonly employed to speak of the secret rites of various religions of that era.
- When the Restrainer is taken off the scene, **the mystery of lawlessness** will become manifest in a public person, the man of lawlessness.
- *Katechein* here is a direct translation of the Hebrew “to restrain,” which occurs in Isa 66:9 in which God “shuts up the womb.” Paul knows that **the mystery of lawlessness** is active because evil has not yet reached its climax.
- God restrains the Day of the Lord because of the plan that the gospel first be brought to all.

2:8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

- This verse begins with **and then**, indicating the result of the removal of the Restrainer, which is that **the lawless one will be revealed**.
- The verb, *apokalypsthesetai* that describes his coming denotes that the veil will be taken off so that he will be revealed to everyone.
- Paul now picks up the language of Isa 11:4, where the Messiah, the coming “shoot from the stump of Jesse”, in righteousness and justice, will slay the wicked with “the breath of his mouth.”
- Similarly, in Rev 19:21 the rider on the white horse, Christ, executes the kings of the earth and their armies by the sword of the word coming out of the His mouth.
- Paul says **the Lord Jesus will kill**, or overthrow, **the lawless one**, an expression that indicates that He will kill him violently.
- Paul adds that the Lord will destroy this **lawless one**, signifying that the power of the one who is judged will be completely negated and destroyed.
- The **coming** of Jesus is described as his *epiphaneia*, **appearance**, or “epiphany”.
- In the Greco-Roman world, a god’s epiphany was the manifestation of the deity by revealing himself or by some demonstration of his power. This event would even be associated with the **coming**, *parousia*, of the deity.
- The epiphany of **the Lord Jesus** will be so powerful that it will destroy **the lawless one**.

2:9 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,

- The **coming of the lawless one** is called his *parousia*, which is his own royal and divine entrance.
- The power that will be demonstrated in his coming will be satanic, **by the activity of Satan**.
- The term translated **activity** or “working”, *energeias*, implies some form of supernatural activity, which in this case is not inherent in **the lawless one** but rather is energized by **Satan**.
- **Power** denotes any type of miracle.
- **Signs** can also refer to “miracles” but with emphasis on the way they provide evidence showing the nature of the one who manifests them.
- Also, these miracles of **the lawless one** are called **wonders**.

- Although Paul affirms that the power that is behind these **wonders** is **Satan** himself, he calls them **false**, that is, they are a lie.
- A number of ancient documents testify that false miracles accompanied a number of cults.

2:10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

- The satanic purpose is to credit **the lawless one** in his *parousia* by means of supernatural **signs** that will deceive those who have not accepted the gospel.
- He employs **all wicked deception**, *apatē*, which describes his deceitfulness which the ones who have rejected the truth of the gospel will embrace.
- The deception is further described as **wicked** or “evil”, *adikias*.
- The ones who will embrace this **deception of the lawless one** are **those who are perishing**, that is, those who are not saved.
- The reason these people eternally **perish** is **because they refused to love the truth and so be saved**.
- The **truth** is not some abstract concept but rather the gospel itself that had been proclaimed to the believers in Thessalonica.
- Those who do not receive **the truth** will not obtain the benefit offered in the gospel; hence, will not **be saved**.

2:11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,

- As a result of their having rejected **the truth** of the gospel, **God** begins to execute His judgment on the unbelievers.
- What **God sends them** in this judicial act is **strong**, a term that describes some kind of supernatural and powerful action.
- Since this “power” produces in them a great **delusion**, **God sends them** confusion so that they cannot distinguish between what is **the truth** and **false** and, in the end, they **believe what is false** as if it were **the truth**.
- God gives sinners over to the very sin they have embraced (Rom 1:24, 26, 28).

2:12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

- The word translated **may be condemned** comes from the courtroom and points beyond the legal decision to the consequences of a conviction, in this case being condemnation.
- Such people have not only rejected **the truth** of the gospel but also **had pleasure in unrighteousness**.
- The Greek word *eudokētsantes* indicates a condition not of momentary or inadvertent slip, but of active, chosen **pleasure**, and so of flaunting or refusing God’s will and way.
- Those who persist in unbelief, and consequently sin, are responsible for their own destruction. God “gives them up” to the consequences of their own decisions. (Cf Rom 1:24–32; 9:14–32).

Thanksgiving and Prayer (2:13-17)

The phrases that introduce the thanksgivings in 1:3 and 2:13 are nearly identical. In the first thanksgiving of the letter Paul gave thanks for the behavior exhibited by its recipients. Here thanks are rendered for what God is doing for them. God chose them for salvation and called them to obtain glory.

2:13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

- Paul here offers the comfort of the fact that **God chose** these converts to be saved in a certain way: **through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.**
- **God chose** them to be the first converts in this city, and the means by which they are to be saved will be both through the sanctifying work of the Spirit in their inner beings and through their own embrace and trust of the truth.
- The way Paul speaks of this election is unique, since he uses *haireō*, which means “to take for or to oneself.” There is possibly an echo of Deut 26:17–18 LXX, where the context is one of covenanting, not unilateral choice by God. The people have declared that Yahweh is their God, and God has declared that they are His people, His treasured possession.

2:14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Paul speaks of the vehicle of God’s calling, which is not only Paul’s preaching of the gospel, but ultimately God calling through Paul’s preaching.
- Here in Paul *euangelion* refers to the oral proclamation of the gospel message.
- The aim or purpose of the proclamation was that the converts might one day **obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**
- It is the very **glory of Jesus** that they will one day possess, and so they will have been made like Him.
- The purpose of the gospel’s call is the glorification of believers (cf Rom 8:29–30).

2:15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

- The verb here *stēkete* is in the continuous present tense and means “continue to **stand firm**,” referring to an ongoing vigilance and effort on their part.
- The Thessalonians should hold fast to **the traditions** or the “teachings,” *paradoxeis*, received from the apostles.
- Here these sacred and authoritative **traditions** were those **that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.**
- The phrase Paul uses, **by our spoken word**, is a reference to the teaching the apostle gave when they were in the city, while the **letter** refers to what we call First Thessalonians.

2:16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace,

- We have in here a compound subject, namely, the Lord and the Father acting as one.
- **God** is, in the first place, the one **who loved us.**
- The issue here is the final destiny of the believers, their eschatological **hope**, which should become the lens through which they seek to face their present circumstances.
- This destiny is described as **eternal comfort and good hope.**
- In ancient writings the phrase **good hope** frequently referred to “high hopes” that were firm and ripe with the expectation of being fulfilled.
- However, here the thought most likely points to the Christian **hope** which transcends this life and carries with it the promise of happiness in the life hereafter.
- The **comfort**, *paraklēsin*, is that which a person may have in the face of adversity.
- Unlike what was offered in pagan society, the **comfort** that **God our Father** gives is **eternal** and transcends death, offering something more than the grave as the final goal of life.
- What the believers in Thessalonica already enjoyed was **comfort** in the face of death and **hope** that was firm because **God our Father** gave it to them **through grace.**

2:17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

- The desire expressed in the petition to the **Lord Jesus Christ** and **God our Father** is that they might **comfort and establish** the believers.
- Paul most likely has the moral sense of “to exhort” in mind, hence, the petition would be that the **Lord Jesus Christ** and **God our Father** would “exhort” their **hearts**, the center of their moral life.
- Paul wants their morality to be comprehensive, **in every good work and word**.
- The prayer is that everything they do and say will be **good** and not evil.

Paul Requests Prayer (3:1-5)

Paul begins this final section of the letter by requesting the prayers of the Thessalonian believers (3:1–2), a request followed by a confession that the Lord is faithful to establish them (3:3–5). Both the petition and the declaration are framed by references to the hostile opposition both he and the Thessalonians faced.

3:1 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you,

- The imperative here is to pray that **the word of the Lord** will both run swiftly and be glorified everywhere.
- Paul speaks of both the rapid spread of the proclamation and also its reception.
- There is probably an echo of the Isthmian games here, which Paul probably witnessed while in Corinth that runners run so they may **be honored** or glorified by the crowd and the judges when they finish first in the race.
- Paul here uses the running metaphor not of himself but of an impersonal subject, his message.

3:2 and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

- This second request is more personal, that Paul **may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith**.
- If Paul was still in Corinth this may give us a clue to when he wrote this letter, as his trial before Gallio took place probably in late 51 or in 52 at the latest.
- Jewish opposition is likely in mind considering what we know from Acts 18 about Paul’s time in Corinth.

3:3 But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

- Paul stresses that while not all have faith, **the Lord** himself is always **faithful**.
- Here we have simply the promise that the converts, who are said to be **established, the Lord will guard against the evil one**.
- The verbs here should be seen as having ongoing force, so that **the Lord** will continue to **establish** and continue to **guard**.
- Paul does not pray that they will be free from trials but that God will establish and strengthen them in the midst of trials so that they can endure them.

3:4 And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command.

- Paul has **confidence in the Lord** concerning the believers that they **are doing and will do** what needs to be done, that which Paul has **commanded** and charged them to do.
- Paul has confidence in both the Lord and the Lord’s work in the lives of the believers.
- Paul knows that there is a problem in Thessalonica in regard to work, in that some were **doing**, some were not.

3:5 May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

- God is at work in the **hearts** of the Thessalonians, and here Paul prays that God will guide or **direct** their **hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ**.
- Are these two genitival phrases objective or subjective? That is, is the subject divine activity or human emulation of **God's love** and **Christ's steadfastness**?
- It is likely that **the love of God** here is God's own love, but is it in God or in the hearts of the Thessalonians?
- It appears that Paul is here praying that his readers will behave such that they manifest **the love of God** in their community.
- Likewise, he is urging them to show the same **steadfastness**, perseverance, faithfulness, and endurance as **Christ**.
- This is not about **Christ** persevering with them, but rather their persevering or enduring like **Christ**, because **God** has instilled in them **the love** and **steadfastness** to do so.

Warning against Idleness (3:6-15)

Especially during persecution, Christians should seek to live quietly, and this meant not getting caught up in the obligations of clients to patrons. The alternative was to work with one's hands and not be dependent on a patron for one's daily bread and living expenses. However, often the very reason that a client established a relationship with a patron was to avoid attending to the day-to-day affairs of their own lives. Paul's great concern is that Christians live in a way that commends itself to outsiders and does not simply fit into the pagan social culture of clients completely depending on their patrons. Many of the non-elite believers are used to being clients of patrons, with perhaps some Christian patrons and perhaps some non-Christian patrons as well. Although some of the urban poor in the congregation may well be living off the graciousness of some Christians, it is more likely that here Paul is addressing those who used to be clients. Also, the situation may have been exacerbated by a larger problem especially affecting the non-elites, namely famine and the resulting food shortages. Paul's larger concerns about this situation may be that patronage situations create entangling associations which are ethically compromising.

3:6 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

- The initial charge here is a **command** backed up by the authority of **Jesus** himself; hence, to disobey this is to disobey the Lord himself.
- Paul is, in the first instance, addressing those believers who are behaving appropriately.
- The active verb *stellein* has as its literal sense the rolling up of a sail or of a robe, but when used metaphorically it conveyed the idea of shrinking back, shunning, staying away from, or just avoiding.
- **Keeping away** is intended to make clear to the disorderly brother that his behavior is inappropriate and unacceptable.
- *Ataktos* is not the usual word for idleness, but comes from the military realm and refers to insubordinate or disorderly conduct, indicating that those who are behaving this way are doing more than just being idle.
- This word refers to a failure to fulfill one's duties and work obligations.
- Paul has given them all quite specific instructions with regard to work.

3: 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you,

- Paul has already indicated in the past the importance of **imitating** him when it comes to work.
- **To imitate**, *mimesthai*, means, literally, "to mimic by following another's example or teaching."
- What we now call "modeling" behavior for others was a standard teaching tool in the early church.

- Christians were taught to follow the pattern set by those who were living their own lives after the example of Christ.

3:8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.

- The behavior to be imitated is that of working for one's own keep.
- Paul reminds the readers that neither he nor his associates ate **anyone's bread without paying for it**.
- To **eat bread** is a standard Semitism meaning "to make a living".
- They **worked night and day** not to burden the Thessalonians.
- Paul's affirmation **that we might not be a burden to any of you** is exactly the same as the one previously made in 1 Thessalonians 2:9.
- Paul reminds the church of their integrity as they labored and toiled so that they could preach without being a financial burden to the believers.
- Also, Paul's conduct serves as an example for the believers to imitate.

3:9 It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.

- Paul and his associates labored and did not receive benefits as clients **not because we do not have that right, but to give** the believers **an example to imitate**.
- The Thessalonians may have understood these **rights** of being paid with the demands of reciprocity intrinsic in the relationship between patrons and clients.
- Paul argues that the Thessalonians should avoid the patronage system as well, and so he puts himself, Silvanus, and Timothy forward as examples that the members of the church should follow.
- Hence, here Paul states that it was not a matter of his not having the **right** or authority, *exousia*, to ask to be supported as their teacher and apostle, but that he waived that **right** so as not to get caught up in patronage relationships, something he wants his readers to likewise avoid.

3:10 For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

- Paul reminds them that had previously taught them **If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat**.
- Paul's exhortation is directed at those who refuse to work, not those who are unable to do so nor those who have been unable to find work.
- The difficulty of the urban poor in the Greco-Roman world was considerable, especially during famine.
- Rome gave away grain, but not all other cities had such assistance for the poor.
- Those who had no savings to fall back on hired themselves out as day laborers or sought patronage.

3:11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.

- Not only are they **walking in idleness and not busy at work**, they are **busybodies**, meddling in the affairs of others, hindering the work of those engaged in productive labor.
- Philosophers were notorious for being **busybodies** and also for living off of patrons, whom they served as tutors.
- Paul was determined that no one would suggest such a thing about him.

3:12 Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

- Paul charges those in question to **work quietly**, settle down, and **earn their own living**.

- The opposite of meddling in other people's affairs and business is living **quietly** and taking care of one's own.

3:13 As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

- **You** at the beginning here is emphatic.
- Paul here urges the faithful **not to grow weary in doing good**, or in acting in an honorable way.

3:14 If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.

- This does not mean that the disorderly are to be excused, but are to be carefully disciplined.
- The recipients of this letter are to **take note of** or "designate", *sēmeiousthe*, the idle **and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed**.
- Literally, the believers are to avoid mixing with, *synanamignysthai*, the disobedient and disorderly in order to cause them to turn around, *entrapē*.
- The point of the solution here proposed is not excommunication but reformation.

3:15 Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

- The disobedient are not **enemies**, *exthron*, but **brothers**, *adelphon*.
- The purpose of the avoiding is to restore the disobedient to fellowship with the community.

Benediction (3:16-18)

3:16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

- Whenever there is discord or disobedience, **peace** is lacking, especially in its wider sense of "shalom" or wellbeing.
- The idle are not excluded from this peace wish, since it is for **all**.
- Paul is praying here that **the Lord** will superintend even the disciplinary measures and bring a peaceful resolution to the problem.
- The peace wish follows a warning passage, as if to balance it, not only here but in Gal 6:16; 2 Cor 13:11; and Rom 16:20. In each case Paul has been correcting problems before the conclusion of the document.

3:17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.

- The autograph offered here corresponds with what we find in 1 Cor 16:21, probably the next letter Paul wrote, and in Col 4:18.
- Paul took the pen from the amanuensis at this point in all his letters and wrote something.
- The readers would recognize his handwriting and realize that he was the genuine author of the document and that he cared enough to conclude it in a personal way.

3:18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

- The **grace** wish is common to the closing of Pauline letters.
- **All** receive **the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ**, not just the obedient but the unruly and idle as well.
- **Grace** is **of our Lord Jesus Christ**, where the genitive of origin designates **Christ** as the source of **grace**.

- **The Lord Jesus Christ**, the source of **grace**, will sustain the believers in Thessalonica in persecution and vindicate them when He returns to punish the lawless and reward the obedient.
- That same **grace** is to be **with** them **all**.

Soli Dio Gloria!