

Thessalonians

A Careful Study Of Thessalonians

October 17, 2021

I. Introduction

- A. **2 Thessalonians 2:1-4** . . . Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, [2] that you 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. [3] Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, [4] 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 being God.
- B. As I said when we began our study of **1 Thessalonians**, every chapter in both letters has something to say about the return of Christ except the last chapter of **2 Thessalonians**. And though the return of Christ is not the only theme in both letters, it is a major theme. **2 Thessalonians 2** is no different, for it is focused on what leads up to Christ's return so those waiting for His return will not to be deceived into thinking He has returned when He hasn't.
- C. Pray

II. The truth about what precedes the return of Christ

- A. In **vs 1-10**, we learn that someone or some group within the church was teaching or that the return of Christ had already taken place.
 - 1. This teaching or claim was stirring up concern among the believers that they had missed out on a promised and momentous part of their salvation. But to Paul, this teaching was not just misleading, it was deceptive, that is, it was intentionally misleading.
 - 2. Therefore, Paul exhorts the believers to hold fast to the truth they had been taught when he, Silvanus, and Timothy were with them. In other words, they were not to start questioning or abandoning the truth of God's word just because someone claimed to have a newer truth or a more up-to-date understanding.
 - 3. Paul then clarifies that Christ's return couldn't have happened, nor was it imminent, because two major events must precede it – an apostasy (*a falling away from the faith*) among believers, and a public display of the actions and activities of the man of lawlessness – or the antichrist as the Bible calls him in other places.

B. [1] Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, [2] that you 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.

1. **[2a] That you not be quickly shaken from your composure**

- a. The opposite of being quickly shaken from your composure is to remain calm of mind and emotion. And in this context, it is to base your calmness on what you already know to be true in spite of people claiming to have new information that they say alters or makes irrelevant the truth you already know.
- b. For example, Paul wrote previously, in **1 Thessalonians 4:16**, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”
 - (1) Even if Paul’s description is figurative or metaphorical, it implies a noisy return that would be hard to miss.
 - (2) Therefore, the Thessalonian believers’ composure was being shaken because they were questioning the truth they knew in light of this new information.
2. Interestingly, the problem Paul is addressing in **vs 1-2** is similar to a problem Christians face today – hearing so-called biblical truth that adds to God’s word, or alters the meaning of God’s word, or shows God’s word to be wrong.
 - a. An older example of this is what has been called “The Healthy, Wealthy, Wise Gospel.” A more current example is the altering of scripture to show it supports the LGBTQ lifestyle. A theological example is the New Grace movement. And an example that relates to the return of Christ is Hal Lindsay’s book, The Late Great Planet Earth.
 - b. Because we are not immune to this problem, it is important for us to know God’s word well enough to be able to evaluate the truth or significance of information that someone in the church is claiming is from God, or has been discerned through the leading of the Holy Spirit, or has been gleaned from a portion of scripture to which they have given a new, more modern interpretation.
 - c. Now it is possible you don’t know God’s word well enough to do your own evaluation of what is being claimed or taught as truth.

If that is the case, I urge you to take what you are hearing or reading to someone who does and get their opinion on it.

- d. In another letter, Paul presents a solution to this problem that requires the Christian community working together. **Ephesians 4:11-14**, “And [God] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, [12] for the equipping of the saints (*giving them the education and tools they need*) for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. [14] As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”
 - e. In the **vs 2b**, Paul identifies the source of the misinformation.
3. **[2b]** a **spirit** or a **message** or a **letter** as if from us.
- a. As civilized, educated, and scientifically minded Americans, most of us know very little, if anything, about the spirit world and its activities. And yet, God’s word speaks about this mostly unseen world in a number of places and ways. For example,
 - (1) The reality of this world is seen in God forbidding interaction with evil spirits in **Deuteronomy 18:10-11**, “There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, [11] or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.”
 - (2) King Saul knew the spirit world was real, for he asked a medium to conjure up Samuel to tell him what to do when the Philistines were attacking Israel (**1 Samuel 28**).
 - (3) We read in the Gospels that Jesus cast demons out of people, many of whom would be described as mentally ill.
 - (4) And John warned Christians to be wary of messages from spirits or prophets who claim to speak through the leading of the Spirit, because not all spirits are from God. **1 John 4:1-3**, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. [2] By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come

in the flesh is from God; [3] and every spirit that does not confess Jesus, is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.”

- b. We Christians need to be aware that evil spirits are active in our world – and part of their activity is to mislead Christians, and in so doing, create confusion and division within the church. Therefore, we need to become knowledgeable enough in God’s word, wise enough with God’s wisdom, and careful enough to discern truth from falsehood – in spite of who is saying it – so as not to be led astray.
- 4. From deceptive messages that come from spirits, Paul moves on to warn against unquestioningly accepting any message or book that the presenter claims is from Paul – or in our case today, from God or the Holy Spirit – and especially if it is a new interpretation of God’s word.
 - a. Though you may not be familiar with this, it is not uncommon for Christian leaders, teachers, pastors, and writers to claim to have a word from God, or a prophetic word for the church, or a new understanding of some portion of God’s word.
 - b. Here again, regardless of the claim, we are to evaluate what is said against what we already know to be true in God’s word.
 - c. The Bible is our anchor for truth. The teachings of Christ are the foundation of truth. The epistles show us the application of truth to church life and our personal lives.
 - d. Once you raise your anchor – you are adrift, and where you go will no longer be determined by God and His word, but by worldly winds, cultural waves, and the popular currents of the day.
- C. [3a] Let no one in any way deceive you, for [the return of Christ] will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction . . .
 - 1. **Let NO ONE IN ANY WAY deceive you**
 - a. This is a strongly worded exhortation. The word LET is the same as ALLOW, and in this case it means to NOT GIVE permission or give freedom or lower your defenses so as to let the deceiver in.
 - b. Without question, Christians who are naive or untaught are more easily misled. Yet even they are expected to protect

themselves from being misled by meeting with a group of believers who recognize the bad teaching that circulates within the church.

- c. Therefore, if we take Paul's exhortation seriously, it means being deceived is not a case of ignorance, but of carelessness, caused by not paying attention, or not taking the time to think about and evaluate what we are hearing or reading, or not finding someone or a group who knows the truth and will show us the truth.
 - d. Once again, to recognize deception, we need an immovable, unchanging truth by which to compare what we are hearing or reading. And that immovable, unchanging truth is the word of God.
2. Now you may be thinking that guarding against being deceived is relatively easy. But it isn't. The devil is involved in the deception business, and he is not only crafty, he has plenty of co-workers and human workers willing to join his efforts.
- a. For example, those who see the church as an opportunity to build their own kingdom or enrich their own bank accounts or be seen as someone important are prone to use deception to accomplish their goal.
 - b. This is such a problem that the scriptures warn us to be on guard against those in the church who would seek to deceive us for their own advantage.
 - (1) **Ephesians 5:5-6**, "For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. [6] Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."
 - (2) **Colossians 2:8**, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ."
 - (3) **Romans 16:17-18**, "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. [18] For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting (*naive, gullible, careless*)."

D. [3b] Let no one in any way deceive you **for [the return of Christ] will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed**, (*who is*) the son of destruction [4] 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 being God.

1. Paul explains that two major events must precede the return of Christ – an apostasy among believers large enough to be noticed, and a public display of the actions and activities of the man of lawlessness – who is also known as the antichrist.
 - a. The word apostasy appears 6 times in the Bible, 5 times in the OT and once in the NT. In the OT, it is used to describes Israel's abandonment of their trust in God, obedience to God, and worship of God.
 - b. Therefore, in the context of **2 Thessalonians 2:3**, it is reasonable to conclude that the coming the apostasy will be a noticeable amount of Christians abandoning their trust in God, obedience to God, and worship of God because they have allowed themselves to be misled, or in order to avoid persecution.
 - c. In my opinion, this should not surprise us since so many in our day have become Christians for their own sake rather than God's sake. Since they started out self-interested it is likely they will remain self-interested when persecution comes.
2. I know there is more to say about this section of 2 Thessalonians, and it is my goal to return to this section the next time we meet. But for today, I want to finish by reading Jesus' words about His return found in **Mark 13:5-23**. Listen as I read and you will hear a similar message to what the Thessalonian believers received from Paul and were personally experiencing when Paul wrote to them.

E. **Mark 13:5-23** . . . And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. [6] "Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many. [7] When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. [8] For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. [9] But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. [10] The gospel must first be

preached to all the nations. [11] When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. [12] Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. [13] You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. [14] But when you see the ABOMINATION of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. [15] The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; [16] and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. [17] But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! [18] But pray that it may not happen in the winter. [19] For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. [20] Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. [21] And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; [22] for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. [23] But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance."

III. Conclusion

- A. What awaits our world is both horrible and wonderful. May we heed God's word and be prepared so that we are counted worthy of our calling and the kingdom of God when Christ returns.