

Mid Week • 2 Thessalonians 1-3

INTRODUCTION

This short letter of the Apostle Paul to the church at Thessalonica was written no more than 3 or 4 months after 1 Thessalonians so that makes it one of the first letters he wrote that we have in the Bible.

In that first letter, Paul had written about the future, and while it had cleared up some of their misunderstandings about the coming of Christ, it had raised others.

Some false teaching had sprung up that was bringing anxiety so Paul writes *this* letter to correct the error.

What that was we'll see in a few moments.

We won't go into much depth tonight on the background of the city or church of Thessalonica.

If you're curious about that, you can get a copy of the tape of our first study in 1 Thessalonians.

Let me just briefly summarize:

Paul arrived in Thessalonica on his *second* missionary journey.

Thessalonica was a large city of some 200,000, a key shipping port, and lay on a major highway of the Roman Empire so it was a strategic center for the gospel to take hold.

It was part of Paul's strategy to plant churches in urban centers because he knew they would influence large regions around them.

His initial efforts in Thessalonica were fruitful and within just a few days, a solid work had begun.

But opposition soon arose and just a few weeks after arriving, he had to leave.

He then went to Athens and finally came to Corinth where he spent some time.

From Corinth, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, seeking to lay a more solid foundation than he had been able to in the short time he had been there.

People from Thessalonica had visited him in Corinth, and told him about some of the problems in the church, so he penned that first letter and sent it off in hopes it would settle the unrest.

It worked, but now, Paul has learned that there was another issue that was creating a disturbance among the disciples and he writes this second letter to correct it.

The problem was this: Because the persecution the believers in Thessalonica were enduring was so harsh, there were those who saying the *Day of the Lord* had already come, that they were living *in* the Tribulation.

Since Paul was so clear in his teaching about the Blessed Hope of believers in 1 Thessalonians, many were despairing that they had somehow *missed* the Rapture of the Church.

So Paul writes this letter to correct them and show them they *can't* be living in the Day of the Lord because certain *specific events* haven't occurred yet.

The Day of the Lord is a technical term that we will have to understand if we're to understand all of what Paul has to say here.

We'll do that when we get in to chapter 2.

CHAPTER 1

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

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

Paul was in Corinth when he wrote this letter.

His friends and ministry companions Timothy and Silas, here called *Silvanus*, were with him as he sought to plant a church in the corrupt but strategic center of Corinth.

He begins with his typical greeting "Grace and Peace" – uniting the Greek greeting of *charis*, or "the blessing of joy" to the Hebrew *shalom*, "the blessing of peace."

³We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, ⁴so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, ⁵which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; ⁶since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, ⁷and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Can you believe it – that is one long sentence!

It's obvious Paul didn't use a word-processor with a grammar-checker because that never would have passed.

The main idea in vs. 3-8 is that the Thessalonians were *genuine believers*, proven by their steadfast loyalty to God and flourishing love for one another, manifest in the face of intense opposition and persecution.

The hostility toward the gospel that had begun when Paul was originally there had grown with the passage of time.

Yet despite the opposition, the church had grown and the believers had gotten *stronger*.

For this Paul rejoices and gives thanks to the Lord.

We covered vs. 3 & 4 on Sunday – get tape if not here.

Paul sees the persecution they were enduring as **evidence** of their **sincere faith**.

Paul well knew that taking a stand for Christ in this world results in hostility.

Jesus Himself said that following Him would result in the world's hatred and that persecution at the hands of the world was *an evidence* of faith in Him.

Matt. 5:11-12

¹¹**“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.**

¹²**Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

John 15:18-20

¹⁸**“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it* hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.**

Paul writes to encourage them and tell them that they were doing well, in fact, so well that he was pointing to them as an example of faith and love.

More than likely, the Thessalonians didn't see themselves as examples!

Because of the suffering they were enduring, they saw themselves as weak and pressed down.

Far from being victorious, they saw themselves as despised and hated.

Let's say you work in a large company and you've taken a lonely stand for Christ and have been persecuted as a result – told to keep silent, threatened with your job, mocked, made fun of by other employees, and belittled by your boss.

But you remain faithful to the Lord each day.

You refuse to deny Him and His lordship over your life.

At every opportunity you take a stand for righteousness – and still speak to individuals about the Lord.

As you look at yourself against the backdrop of that kind of opposition, you're going to feel weak and probably pretty inconsequential because you don't see the results of your life and witness.

But the fact is, your lonely stand, *in itself* is a *powerful testimony* to your faith and the reality of the Gospel.

Heroes don't feel like heroes at the moment of their heroism.

They feel *fear* – but press on in the face of that fear because they know what they're doing is *right*.

It is only others who watch who see them as heroic!

In Revelation 2, Jesus sent a letter to the church at Smyrna.

This was a church enduring crushing persecution.

Jesus said to them,

“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (*but you are rich*)”

They saw themselves as troubled and poor – but Jesus tells them, in fact they are rich – rich in reward in heaven because of their faithfulness to Him.

And so it was in Thessalonica – they were persecuted and suffering and so saw themselves as weak and ineffectual.

Paul tells them they were a cause of joy and thankfulness because in the midst of the pressure, they were thriving in faith and abounding in love!

Then he comforts them with the reminder that the world doesn't get the **last word** – **God** does!

The world may be oppressing them now, but in the end, it is they who will be **vindicated** and the world will be **punished**.

Persecution marks them as the people of God.

And because they ARE the people of God, He will come and punish those who have oppressed them.

⁹**These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ¹⁰when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.**

¹¹**Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹²that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

It was Paul's consistent prayer that no matter what happened, his converts would continue to grow and become more like Christ.

CHAPTER 2

¹**Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you,**

²**not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.**

Now we get to the heart of the matter – here is *why* Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians.

Word had reached him that there was some confusion about the timing of end-time events.

The severity of persecution in Thessalonica had led some to conclude that the **Tribulation** had *begun* – and if the Tribulation had begun, then that means the **Rapture** had already taken place, and they had **missed** it!

That's why they were “**shaken**” as it says in v. 2.

Notice the first phrase of v. 1 . . .

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him

That's a reference to the **Rapture**.

The Thessalonians were worried that they had missed out on it somehow.

But Paul says, concerning the Rapture – don't worry, you haven't missed it!

It seems from what he says in v. 2 that someone had forged a message from him, either by a word of prophecy, or by a written letter, claiming the *Day of Christ* had come.

He flatly refutes this and says, "I sent no such message!"

Now, it's at this point that we need to stop and clarify our terms.

The phrase, "**Day of Christ**" at the end of v. 2 is *not the same* as what's meant at the beginning of v. 1 – "*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him*"

These two phrases refer to **two different** events!

The Day of Christ, is the same as *The Day of the Lord*, which is a technical term in both the Old and New Testament.

The Day of the Lord refers to God's **direct intervention** in human history.

In both the Psalms and the Prophets it refers to the end times when God moves to wrap up this age of man's rebellion against His rule and the establishment of His kingdom in glory on earth.

It begins with the onset of the *Great Tribulation*, the last 3½ years of the Tribulation period, proceeds through the Second Coming of Christ, the re-gathering of Israel to her homeland, the judgment of the nations, and the entire Millennial reign of Christ.

It is called *The Day of the Lord* because it is in every way – **HIS Day!**

He takes possession of that which rightly belongs to Him.

It commences with the **last half** of the Tribulation as He moves to wrest control of earth from rebel mankind who has united under the tyrannical and demonic rule of the antichrist.

In the Prophets and the Book of Revelation, we see that during the Great Tribulation, the people of the earth will realize that the judgments they are seeing are the direct and divine acts of God.

They try to hide from the eyes of Him who sits on the throne.

While the Day of the Lord refers specifically to the end of history, there have been *foreshocks* of the Day of the Lord in the *past*.

These have been times when God moved to intervene in the affairs of earth in specific and demonstrable ways to regularly remind the human race that He is Lord over All.

So the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah can be understood as a Day of the Lord, as can the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians and then later, the Romans.

These were times when God moved specifically to reveal His judgment in the events of history.

But *past* events are only meant to give color and potency to the *ultimate* Day of the Lord which occurs at the end.

In the New Testament, the Day of the Lord is called the Day of Christ, the Day of the Jesus Christ, the Day of wrath, the Day of Judgment, and simply, The Day.

So, here was the problem in Thessalonica –

Someone was saying that Paul taught that the Day of the Lord had already begun, as evidenced by the persecution they were enduring.

But if they were *in* the Day of the Lord, that meant they had missed the Rapture, Christ's coming in which they would be gathered to Him.

Now, think about it - If Paul had taught them that the Rapture occurs **after** the Tribulation, then they would have been **excited**, not **shaken**, because the Rapture was just in **front** of them.

But no, their distress was due to the fact that they understood Paul to teach that the Rapture occurred **before** the Tribulation, and if they were **in** the Tribulation then that meant they had **missed** the Rapture!

So, Paul writes to correct them.

³Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [meaning the Day of the Lord] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Notice that the phrase in v. 3 "*that Day will not come*" is in italics.

The reason is because it's NOT IN THE ORIGINAL GREEK TEXT - it's supplied by the translators.

V. 3 flows out of v. 2 and what Paul has just said about the Day of Christ.

Paul is saying here that the Day of Christ CANNOT HAVE COME because certain things were not being seen!

What are the things that must proceed or attend the beginning of the Day of the Lord?

1) **the falling away comes first,**

The Greek word here for "falling away" is **apostasy** and means a deliberate **abandonment** of a once held-belief.

What's important about the way we find the word used here is that it's preceded by the definite article "the."

Paul says that before the Day of the Lord can begin, *The Apostasy* must happen.

The only apostasy that would be of any consequence is a departure from the Faith, from the Gospel – from the truths that frame the Christian Church.

History has seen many movements and splinter factions that have broken away from orthodoxy.

There have been thousands of apostates to the Faith throughout the centuries.

But what Paul is describing here is something different.

This is a *general departure* from the Faith.

It's deliberate and intentional.

It's a decided break with historic, biblical Christianity and the embracing of something other than Apostolic doctrine.

Just prior to the onset of the Day of the Lord, in fact, one of the factors that allows for the onset of the last days, is a general and deliberate departure of those who constitute the *visible* church, from the historic Christian Faith.

Of course, if the real church has been raptured some 3½ years prior to this, as we suppose, then all that's left behind for the first half of the Tribulation is the fake.

It's not hard to imagine this false church turning away from any kind of pretense of faith when the Holy Spirit who retrains evil has been taken out of the way.

The second thing that precedes or that attends the onset of the Day of the Lord is . . .

2) ³and the **man of sin** is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

It's no secret who this is – this is the **antichrist!**

He is called "the man of sin."

While apart from Christ all of us are sinners, this guy is the *consummate Sinner*.

He isn't *a* man of sin, he is *THE* man of sin.

The antichrist will be the ultimate expression of human rebellion.

Sin will find it's most complete and extensive expression in his career and lifestyle.

He will commit and participate in acts of evil beyond our imagination.

He's also called here the "son of perdition."

Perdition means *ruin* or *destruction*.

He is the son of destruction because that is his *destiny*.

He not only will come to ruin, but on his way there, he wreaks havoc and brings desolations to the earth through his evil plans.

V. 4 tells us what he will do at the very outset of the Day of the Lord.

He will oppose all that is considered divine and that is worshipped, and exalt himself above all.

In other words, he won't just deny the God of the Bible; he will claim sole right to all of mankind's worship and religious devotion.

All Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists will be called on to worship and honor him alone.

As the consummate act of his blasphemy, he will enter the newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, proceed into the Holiest Place, and there declare himself to be God.

Note carefully the words Paul uses to describe this blasphemous act.

so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

It seems that once he takes his seat in the temple, claiming to be God, he then does something that demonstrates the power of deity and so *shows himself* to be god.

Paul refers to this in v. 9 as "lying signs and wonders."

But now he says . . .

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

This was not *new* to them. He had already told them these things when he had been with them.

But as we all know, when it comes to understanding the sequence and order of the last days, it can get a bit confusing.

Add some false teaching on top of that, as was happening in Thessalonica, and you end up with a problem.

What I find interesting about v. 5 is what this reveals to us about what Paul considered critical and foundational teaching for new believers.

He had only spent 3 weeks in Thessalonica before he was forced to leave.

3 weeks! Yet he had counted teaching them about the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Second Coming of Christ and even the rise and career of the antichrist as critical to their education and discipleship.

That's why he writes here –

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

Many today want to relegate Bible prophecy to the back shelf.

They avoid the subject of the Last Days, the Rapture, the Tribulation, and all that because it can be contentious with all the varied opinions floating around.

Listen – if we exercised a bit more care in our study of the Word of God, I think we'd find many of those theories evaporating. Instead of avoiding this subject, we ought to dig in to God's word and apply ourselves to find out what it says on these things.

Paul thought this a *foundational issue* of being a follower of Christ – so he taught it faithfully to the Thessalonians.

Because he had taught them, he could now remind them – so he says . . .

⁶And now you know . . .

Why – how did they know? Because he had already taught them.

⁶And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

That *who* may be revealed? The Antichrist!

You see, something is standing in the way of his revelation.

This is Paul's way of proving to the Thessalonians that they can't be in the Day of the Lord – because something is holding

back the antichrist's revelation, which attends or is a part of the Day of the Lord.

That restraining influence will *not be present* in the Day of the Lord and so the antichrist's revelation will become possible. Just what it is that restrains the antichrist, we'll discover in a moment.

First Paul says . . .

⁷For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.

The *mystery of lawlessness* refers to the **hidden** or **secret** conspiracy of **rebellion** fallen man in league with the devil, has declared against God.

Even in his day – Paul could see the principle of evil already at work.

In 1 John 4:3 John says,

This is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

John also identifies that the antichrist is coming in the future, but even in his day, he could see the spirit or principle of the antichrist at work.

Paul says here that the antichrist *himself* could not be revealed because something was holding him back.

But the spiritual, religious, political and economic platform the antichrist will come to preside over was already being constructed.

If you step back and look at history from a wider vantage point, it's easy to see how satan has worked consistently behind the scenes to manipulate things.

First, he slipped into the Garden and elicited Adam and Eve in his rebellion against God.

God ended that attack by banishing them from the Garden and the Tree of Life and bringing the judgment of death and the curse of inefficient labor.

Then satan sought to corrupt the human race through vile unions between the demonic and human races – and the earth became so violent and filled with sin it demanded the judgment of the flood.

Coming out of the ark, satan then conspired with the leaders of mankind to build a new society based on rebellion against the Lord – but again, God judged it with a confusion of languages.

Ever since then, satan has been working to overcome the barrier of languages, and has been working in diverse places to bring about a new and united rebellion against God.

Here we are at the beginning of the 21st Century and once again, the human race is united by global communications and the common language of computers.

The world's economic systems are being united through trade pacts and currency markets and the buying and selling through electronic funds transfers.

Political systems are being merged and simplified.

And then we see the tremendous push to bring the various religions of the world together.

On top of all that are the technological advances that allow a *literal fulfillment* of things in scripture people of previous generations have had to spiritualize;

Like buying and selling with numbers instead of cash,

Global communications and high tech weapons.

The astute student of Bible prophecy can say *today*, "I can see the hidden satanic conspiracy to bring forth a one-world government under the leadership of the antichrist at work in this day."

Paul could see the threads of it back then.

Indeed, the prophet Daniel had foretold the sequence of world empires that would come to rule.

The last was Rome, and then out of it, in the last days would emerge a revival of the old Roman Empire into a new form over which the antichrist would come to rule.

Living in the Roman Empire and seeing how things were shaping up between the world and the Church, Paul could see the mystery of lawlessness already at work, setting the stage for the last days.

That stage would go one being set for another 2000 years, and now that it IS set, all that is left is for the imposter, the antichrist, to step out and say his lines.

But he can't at present because *something is holding him back*.

There has been a long and sometimes fierce debate over just who or what Paul means by the restraining force.

But it really ought not be that difficult to sort out since Paul repeats something Jesus Himself had said.

In John 14, 15, & 16, as we read Jesus speaking to the disciples about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, He alternates between using *neuter* and *masculine* pronouns when speaking of the Spirit.

The reason He does this is because while the word *spirit* is neuter in Greek, because He is referring to the 3rd person of the Trinity, He uses the masculine personal pronoun as well.

Well, here Paul does precisely the same thing.

In v. 6 he refers to the Holy Spirit by the neuter "what" is restraining, and then by the masculine "he" in v. 7.

Of course, it makes perfect sense to understand that it's the **Holy Spirit** who's restraining the emergence of the antichrist.

The main objective of the Holy Spirit is to **glorify** Christ, as we see in John 16.

The *antichrist* is just that – "the **against**-Christ" or "**instead**-of-Christ one".

In Matthew 5, Jesus said that as the disciples followed Him, they would be the **salt** and **light** of this world.

Salt was primarily used in that day, not as a seasoning, but as a preservative.

They didn't use refrigeration as a means of food storage and so depended on salt as their main preservative against decay.

Light of course, is idiomatic of truth and goodness which dispels the darkness of evil.

As we follow Christ, Christians are the primary force in this world that **resists decay** and the moral **pollution** of sin.

D. James Kennedy has written a wonderful book titled, *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?*

The premise is that Jesus' life and mission, as lived out by His followers has resulted in most of the blessing and abundance we enjoy in the modern world.

It's as believers have consistently applied the Word of God and the Life of Christ to their personal lives, careers, and disciplines, that society has been affected for good.

But what happens when the true Church, all those men and women indwelt by the Spirit of God are suddenly and violently ranked off the face of the planet in the Rapture?

What of the world when the salt runs out and the light goes off?

No wonder the first thing that happens during the Tribulation as Paul says in v. 3, is *The Apostasy!*

When the real Christians are gone – what's left behind in the institutional church?

Fakes, imposters and pretenders.

Most of these will be clueless and will be nothing but happy that all the goody-two-shoes are gone!

Even now, there are huge battles going on in mainline denominations over the heart of the Faith.

Presbyterians and Methodists are debating issues of sexuality and whether or not it's okay to ordain homosexuals.

The largest Protestant denomination in the US, the Southern Baptists, have been torn apart by a heated debate for the last 20 years on whether or not the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

The conservatives have managed to eek out a narrow margin of victory in their annual conference but each year their margin becomes narrower as more and more delegates to the convention opt for a liberal stand on the Scriptures.

The liberals would love nothing more than for all the conservatives to "go away."

Well, they will – and the liberals will be left to do what they want.

⁸And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

The first half of the Tribulation will see the **rise** of the antichrist to **power**; he will be deemed by most of the world to be a genius and a savior.

It isn't till the **mid-point** of the Tribulation that his benevolent **mask** comes off and he's *revealed* as a demonically-inspired destroyer.

And then he is only allowed to proceed for **3½** years!

When Jesus comes back at the end of the Tribulation, He makes short work of the antichrist.

He speaks a word and the enemy is defeated, the rebellion put down.

Paul now goes on to speak about what the antichrist's career will be like and why it will be so insidious and deceptive.

⁹The coming of the lawless one is according to [or "attended by"] the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, ¹⁰and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, ¹²that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Here is why the Tribulation is a period of time so different from any other age – because the **restraining** influence of the Holy Spirit, who is also called the Spirit of Truth, is **gone**.

God let's rebel man **go** and have his **own way** without restraint!

Man has rejected God since the dawn of history.

At the point we see here, a man will rise claiming the sole right to worship, and because many will accept him and his claims, God will say, "Okay – go your own way."

Think of it, the rebel alliance satan tried to forge with mankind in Eden, and prior to the flood, and at the tower of Babel, will be completed in the last days under his pseudo-savior, the man of sin, the son of perdition – the antichrist!

And instead of thwarting that alliance as God always has in the past, this time He lets it go.

Satan possesses the antichrist and performs miracles that stun the world into submission to him.

Then, as the final *coup de taut* – the people of earth, who have consistently rejected the truth of the gospel while the Church was still here, and have turned a deaf ear to it since the conclusive proof of the Rapture, swallow the *main lie* the antichrist tells them.

What that lie is, Paul does not say – but note that he calls it, not "a" lie – but "the" lie.

There is a specific deception he has in mind.

Of course, he knew the Thessalonians knew what he was talking about, because it was part of what he had told them when with them.

So, what is THE LIE Paul speaks of here?

Well, let me ask you – what was the *original* lie? What's the first lie we find in Scripture?

Genesis 3 – "**You shall be as God.**"

This has always been the bottom line appeal satan has used to tempt man into rebellion.

You don't have to answer to God – you are your own god and can define your own reality and morality.

This was the lie satan originally told *himself* that sparked his rebellion against the Lord of Glory.

Now, put all this together and here's what we have:

1) The Church is raptured **prior** to the Tribulation.

2) With the salt and light of the Holy Spirit indwelling believers **gone**, evil **flourishes** and the antichrist begins his ascent to power, **built** on the **stage** of the last 2000 years of the mystery of lawlessness at work in the world.

3) The **Apostasy** takes place in the visible but now spiritually empty church.

4) At the mid-point of the Tribulation, the antichrist's **mask** comes off and he is seen for who he really is.

5) He performs **miracles** through the **power** of the devil,

6) But by then, most people **accept** him and his diabolical scheme.

7) He tells them a **lie** that they readily embrace – that they are **gods**, and that he is the one they need to follow if they are going to realize their **powers** as **gods**.

It's with great interest that we watch the human potential movement and what many secular scientists and sociologists are saying today. Several different disciplines, from psychology to biology to philosophy are saying that the human race has reached the end of this stage of it's evolution and now it's time to make a quantum step up to the next phase of our evolutionary progress.

This next step, they say, is into what we would consider *deity* – that we will harness the power of the mind to do that which seems now to be supernatural but really is only an attaining of our human potential.

New-Agers like Shirley MacLaine say that beings from other planets and dimensions will come to assist us in this transformation.

How ripe the world is for someone to come, claiming to have already made that transition, that evolutionary quantum leap, and seemingly proving his claims with power to perform the supernatural before the eyes of the world.

He will fix the world's attention on himself and then say that if all will simply follow him, he will bring the human race into a glorious new age.

I hope this doesn't sound too far-fetched.

If it *does*, then you haven't been reading and paying attention to current events – because this is precisely what some well-placed and influential people are already advocating.

Paul is now done refining the doctrinal issues regarding the timing of the Lord's return and turns to make all of this practical.

For Paul, prophecy regarding the return of Christ wasn't merely *academic*; it was supremely *practical*.

Because Jesus was coming again, Christians ought to live faithfully for the Lord.

The Thessalonians were, so Paul says . . .

¹³But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Once again, Paul expresses his *joyous duty*, his *beloved obligation* to be thankful to God for the salvation of the Thessalonians.

In Ch. 1 he expressed his gratitude that they were growing in their faith and abundant love for one another.

Here he expresses his appreciation to God that in His mercy and grace He had designed to save them through the message Paul had preached among them.

They had heard, been saved, and then by continuing in that message were growing ever stronger and more mature.

Their destination was to be glorified together with all the saints on that great day when Jesus comes in His glory.

You know, there is something profound here that we might miss but I don't want to go on without mentioning.

How does Paul say they came to faith and were saved and even then were being sanctified and ultimately would be glorified?

Look at v. 13 again . . .

¹³But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Paul had first come to Thessalonica, what was his message – what did he preach?

THE GOSPEL!

He didn't come telling stories and anecdotes.

He didn't come as a slick promoter.

He didn't roll into town after an advance team had come in and put up posters and done extensive promotional work.

He didn't have an organization around him – *The Apostle Paul Evangelistic Association*.

Following the lead of the Spirit, he arrived in Thessalonica, and began preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Paul knew that God's favor and power rests in the simple message of the gospel.

To the Romans Paul wrote – [Rom. 1:16]

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

There were both Jews and Gentiles in Thessalonica – and Paul knew the answer to the real need of both groups was the Gospel.

He knew there's power IN THE GOSPEL!

He knew that he didn't need to help it, or make it more appealing to seekers.

He knew that any fiddling with the message of the gospel would only insert his own human innovations and that would dilute the power of God resident IN THE GOSPEL, so he refrained from his own creative re-working of the message and preached it straight.

And as he did, the power of God went out and touched lives and men and women were saved from hell.

They were reconciled to God and a hunger for Him was placed in their hearts that ensured they would go on in the gospel and become mature.

And one day, they would enjoy the glory of Christ in heaven!

What was true for Paul is just as true for us today.

We don't need to be ashamed of the gospel and hide it behind an appealing façade.

We don't need to help the gospel by *making* it relevant to sinners.

THE GOSPEL IS ALREADY RELEVANT!

It IS the power of God to salvation!
We simply need to be faithful to proclaim it – it's the Spirit's job to apply it – and if we are faithful to our part, He will be faithful to His. You know, it's said that the average life-span of a convert in an evangelical church today is 3 years – then they fall away.

Here Paul commends the Thessalonians that they were growing in their faith by leaps and bounds and that their faith was so sincere it was resulting in the fruit of abounding love for one another –all of this is the face of harsh persecution and trial. Could the reason why we see such a terrible retention rate among converts today and Paul saw such victorious and persevering faith in his time is because we've watered down the gospel while he didn't?
In our attempts to make the Faith more appealing, have we really only coddled the selfishness of a materialistic and pleasure-seeking age?

¹⁵Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

Paul exhorts them to keep on in the pattern of faith he had shown them.

What he wrote to them – we would do well to take heed of ourselves.

¹⁶Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, ¹⁷comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

CHAPTER 3

¹Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run *swiftly* and be glorified, just as *it is* with you, ²and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.

Paul was experiencing opposition to his work there in Corinth and asked for their prayers.

³But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one. ⁴And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you.

⁵Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

Paul now turns to deal with the practical result of the Lord's coming.

In this case, it was a *negative* thing.

You see, there were some who misapplied the Return of Christ.

Because Paul and the other Apostles taught the **imminent** return of Christ for the Church, some had foolishly **quit** their **jobs** and were **sponging** off others.

Paul writes to rebuke this **indolence**.

⁶But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; ⁸nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, ⁹not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

¹⁰For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. ¹¹For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

¹²Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

¹³But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary *in* doing good. ¹⁴And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.

Since these verses are going to constitute my text for Sunday, we'll leave for then.

¹⁶Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord *be* with you all.

¹⁷The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write.

¹⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.

Due to his failing eyesight, Paul often used a secretary to write his letters, but at the end he made his mark to verify he was the author. He concludes by commending them to the grace and peace of God – which is finally where every pastor has to leave his flock.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude tonight, I would ask that you pray for me and for the entire body as we gather this Sunday to look at vs. 6-15.

This will be a difficult message because it will challenge those who have an unbiblical attitude toward work.

Pray for grace and for open and receptive hearts – and pray for me as I study and prepare the message – that God would use me to bring health and wholeness to His people.

Phil. 1:6, 10 1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5 1 Thess. 5:2 Phil. 2:16 1 John 4:17 1 Thess. 5:4 2 Tim. 1:12 Rom. 2:5

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“Feed My Sheep”

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