**Part 10 - Hope in the Midst of Persecution**

**INTRODUCTION**

Good intentions. We all have them, and Paul was certainly full of good intent in writing to encourage a struggling young church in Thessalonica, offering them hope, guidance and the promise of a returning savior in Christ. But not long after, the church was growing impatient—Christ had not returned, their past pagan ways and current culture were not being punished for their sins, and Christians in this new faith were being persecuted—so what’s the point?

In this lesson we explore the beginning of Paul’s 2nd letter—the follow-up if you will, and yet it is another Biblical lesson for us today as well—as we also wait for the second coming of Christ, we need to be sure we’re focused on doing God’s will and preparing our hearts, not keeping a list of those around us who deserve punishment.

**PART I – The Greeting (Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4)**

*1Paul, Silas and Timothy,*

*To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*

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

*3We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. 4Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.*

Who wouldn’t want to receive a letter that starts out like this? Grace and peace to you, we thank God for you, your faith is growing and your love increasing—and we boast about you!

Q: What does grace mean?

Pastor Steven J. Cole writes that “by thanking God for their growth in faith and love, rather than congratulating the Thessalonians for their progress, Paul is acknowledging that these qualities come from God.” What an effective method Paul employs as he’s attempting to uplift a struggling young church—it’s not about what they’ve done, it’s about thanking God for what He’s blessed them with and allowed them to do by His grace, and their continued growth is fully reliant upon Him.

Q: Share a time when you have recently thanked God for the faith or works of others, or even something you recognize He has done in your own life. God loves to hear our thanks, and it is encouraging for Christians young and old in our faith to hear such simple and rewarding testimony.

***PART II – God’s Judgment (Read 2 Thessalonians 2:5-10)***

*5All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might 10on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.*

Paul transitions in these verses from salutations to assurances. By most historical accounts this letter is written about a year after 1st Thessalonians, as members of the church were wondering why they have to behave differently while the pagan world around them hasn’t changed—nor has Christ returned as Paul recently promised:

***READ: 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17***

*16For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.*

So Paul is now writing again, to both clarify the unknown timing of the second coming of Christ, and also that the judgment of others is for God and God alone. It is not for the Thessalonians (nor us as modern-day Christians) to point out our own worthiness or the unworthiness of others to God. As verse 6 states, God is just.

Q: Paul did write in 1 Thessalonians 5:1 that dates and times were not known as “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” Why do you think that did not sink in with the Thessalonians? Where might they have gotten the notion that Jesus should have returned by now?

**PART III – Supplication (Read 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)**

*11With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. 12We pray this 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.*

What does Paul do when he can’t be with the church in Thessalonica? He prays for them. Paul was of course no stranger to persecution, and the Bible teaches us repeatedly that from our trials comes our growth. Pastor Cole notes that “Paul never writes, “I pray that your persecution will end soon.” Rather, his prayers are focused on their growth in godliness and on the furtherance of God’s kingdom and glory through their perseverance in persecution.”

Q: How specifically does Paul pray for his readers?

Q: How can/do we follow Paul’s example of praying for others?

**SUMMARY**

If we knew nothing else about Paul, we could still learn an awful lot from these verses. His writing style combines three “can’t-miss” traits of effective communication: he opens with love and thankfulness, is clear and concise with the intent of his message, and concludes with thankfulness and prayer. We can practice this today whether having a conversation with a loved one or sending an email to a coworker: be courteous, be honest, and be gracious. And let’s remember Paul didn’t have the opportunity to clear up misconceptions over a text or Zoom call—if his letters weren’t received as intended it could be weeks or months for a clarification!

Christian brothers and sisters, God loves us, and He will judge and punish those who do not know Him in His own way and time. It is not for us to contemplate or carry out. Our focus should be on understanding and doing God’s will. As Paul prayed for the believers in Thessalonica, let us pray for each other that God will indeed make us worthy of His calling, pray that our faith in Him will be strengthened, and lift our praises high for His glory.

Sources:

Bible.org, Lesson 1: A Healthy Church (2 Thessalonians 1:5), Steven J. Cole

Bible.org, Lesson 3: A Simple Lesson Service (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12), Steven J. Cole

Bible.com

Life Application Study Bible (NIV), Tyndale House