

NOT YOUR DAD'S END TIMES STUDY

Session 4 - II Thessalonians 1:5-2:12

Some time had passed between the writing of I & II Thessalonians. The theme of Paul's second letter to the church at Thessalonica was the Lord's second coming. Though we aren't told any specifics about the spreaders of false information and doctrine, right off the bat Paul confronts the notion that this false teaching about the Lord's return is afflicting the Thessalonian believers with grief and pain and he's going to set the record straight for them ... again.

I. Comfort for the believers.

A. [II Thessalonians 1:5-12]

1. The main thrust of this passage is that God will repay those who don't know God with eternal affliction at the Lord's second coming just as those unbelievers were then temporally afflicting the Thessalonian believers. Many see God as vengeful after reading these verses but the truth is that God is responding to human sin and the hardness of the lost human heart when He doles out retribution.

a. Think of it this way. God is holy and does not sin and has never sinned. He created an entire race of beings, humans, for the sake of enjoying fellowship with them for eternity. Yet, this race of created being designed to glorify God and enjoy Him rebelled against Him through sin. There were two major problems with sin (among many others) that surfaced. First, sin leads to death and man was not designed to die but live eternally with God and second, sin separated man from God and His light so that man is forced to live in spiritual darkness. However, God loves mankind so much that He sent His beloved, only Son to earth to pay the penalty for the sins of all mankind. This payment was going to result in the death of His only Son. Just to get a scope of the relationship the Father has with the Son, it's important to know that they have never, in all eternity up until the cross, ever been separated from each other. They have dwelt in perfect harmony, love and power for all time. The Son, Jesus Christ, was the Father's most precious relationship, beloved beyond our imagination. Jesus was the true treasure of all heaven and just the act of sending Him to earth - God in human form - was a massive condescension for Him. But that wasn't enough. Jesus had to actually die as the wages and penalty of sin is always death. Under the old covenant when a person offered a sacrifice to God to cover up their sins, they had to offer a spotless or animal without any blemishes or imperfections to be accepted by God. So while mankind would die for their sins, the act of giving a perfect animal covered up the person's sin - didn't take the sin away - just covered it up until the next offering was given. Jesus, God's precious and treasured Son, came as a man. He lived without sin, thus He was perfect in God's sight and God sent Him to earth with the purpose to die in our place, for our sins, on the cross. In other words, God gave Jesus to us and for us - so that we would have the opportunity to accept this gift of grace and be restored in full fellowship, without any sins, back to God and live eternally with Him in His love, glorifying Him for all time. This is the gift of eternity to an entire race of people who don't deserve anything other than death. The depth and riches of God's love was shown through Jesus dying in our place on the cross. Imagine if you saw a group of people who were perishing and you loved these people. Yet, the only way to rescue them would be through the death of your child, a beloved child. Moved with such love, you allow your child to be sacrificed in order to save the lives of those who were perishing. Instead of accepting the offering of your child for their safety, they instead spurn your actions and love.

How would you feel about these people now? You had offered them a solution to their deepest problem and it was only at great cost to yourself and now they spit in your face by now accepting your loving actions. This is God's situation with the lost of the world.

b. Now fast forward to Paul's words here of a God who may seem vengeful to the darkened human mind. This retribution, this is the justice of God being served upon sinful mankind for not accepting the gift of God's grace offered to them through Jesus. Jesus was a once in eternity gift, the only gift able to save mankind from sin. To spurn grace is to spurn God's love and His sacrifice of His only beloved Son for us. To not accept grace is to spit in God's face and tell Him that you think that Jesus' sacrifice was not needed. To refuse God's grace is tell Him that you don't want to give up your sins and so to enjoy His love eternally. After such a huge and once in eternity gift like the very Son of God is given and a person spurns this, these people have earned the wrath of God that is coming upon them. God is not vengeful but loving yet there is a day set aside when time will end, Jesus will return and God will call into account whether or not each person has accepted the gift of grace He offered them or not. If not, they will become objects of divine retribution justly for having rejected God's offer of love.

2. This won't be the first time God has responded to human sin in judgment. God responded to human sin when He wiped out the world during the flood of Noah's day. God responded to human sin when He gave the Promised Land to His children, the Israelites, after the original inhabitants of the land refused to repent from their heinous sins for 500 years. God showed immense patience based on His love for the original inhabitants of Canaan before He saw that their hearts were beyond recovery and it led to their destruction.

[Romans 1:18-32] - The Lord is responding to human sin by handing them over to their lusts and the natural consequences of those lusts. When His love fails to reach a person's hard heart and their lives are nothing more than a constant refusal to His grace, then He will mete out justice on the basis of their sin and rebellion against Him. In this passage, it is the consequences of sin that take a toll on those people. God gives them what they want - more sin - which means more darkness and death. Sin has serious consequences and God's justice cannot overlook sin and sin will not come without a price. Notice, this is meting out justice is a divine act only. We never truly know another's heart. We are not in a position to judge others, only to love them.

Q: According to v.5, what is the current state of the Thessalonian believers (*suffering - this suffering is largely due to some false teaching which leads them to not having any security about eternity.*)

Q: Who will bring ultimate relief to believers? (v. 6 - God)

Q: When will this relief happen? (v. 7 - when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven)

Q: Who else will be revealed when the Lord Jesus returns? (v.7 - mighty angels in flaming fire)

Q: Who gets the retribution of the Lord and why? (v.8 - those who don't know God or obey the gospel)

Q: What is the ultimate fate of those who receive the Lord's retribution? (v.9 - eternal

destruction away from the presence of the Lord. These are the people who didn't want to know God in this life and so they will lose that opportunity for all time.)

Q: What happens to saints on that same day? (*v. 10 - Jesus is glorified IN believers*)

2. Did you get that last statement? When Christ returns, when the day of the Lord occurs, believers are glorified. That's what we saw last week in **I Thessalonians 4:16-17**.

It's also what we saw in **I Corinthians 15**. When Christ returns, we are glorified. This is just one more way that this is not a private event or something that could be kept secret. All believers will be changed to be like Christ on that day at that time.

Q: Based on this truth, what is one way to know for sure that Jesus has actually returned? (*All believers have glorified bodies. If you are wearing the same earth suit as you are now, then Christ hasn't returned. If you are born again and are experiencing pain and weakness, then you can know for sure that Jesus hasn't returned because you don't have your new resurrected body yet.*)

3. All these things are given as a way of reminder to the Thessalonians for their comfort and encouragement that the day of the Lord had not taken place and they missed out. Those who have been feeding them this false information don't know the Lord and they will pay the penalty for upsetting the believers when the Lord returns. In the meantime, Paul and his companions are praying for the church members that remain steadfast and continue in the good works of the Lord in faith and in power so that the name of Jesus will be glorified in them. (*vv. 11-12*)

II. What needs to happen before the day of the Lord?

A. [II Thessalonians 2:1-4]

1. V. 1 sets out the scope of the following passage and lets us know what the information the Thessalonians needed to be reminded of. "*The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together with Him.*" This links this with what just came before it. Just now, Paul is going to be discussing the two things that must happen before Christ returns.

a. Notice in v.2, the goal of Paul's teaching is to set the believers free from misinformation and false teaching. He wants them to be secure in their faith that the Lord has not returned yet and when He does, they will know it.

Q: What are the two things that will happen BEFORE the return of the Lord Jesus? (*v.3 - the apostasy and the coming of the man of lawlessness*)

Q: This passage is a clear teaching about timing. What comes first? The Lord's coming OR the apostasy and revealing of the man of lawlessness? (*v.3 - the apostasy and the coming of the man of lawlessness*)

Q: What implication does this have for believers who are still alive at this time in history? (*Christians will still be in the world right up until the return of Christ. They will be present for the apostasy and the reign of the man of lawlessness as they will be the only people able to*

recognize both events.)

2. We need to look at these two events.

a. The apostasy. This word means “to defect, to fall away, to revolt or rebel”. In the current context, this will be a rebellion against the Christian faith and the Living God Himself. It is described in other New Testament passages. Keep in mind these passages are describing the same time in history.

1) **Matthew 24:10-12**

2) **Jude 17-19**

3) **II Timothy 3:1-9**

Q: What are some of the common traits listed among people during this time of the apostasy?

4) It is important to note that Paul doesn't elaborate on the apostasy. In other words, the Thessalonian believers already knew enough about this time in history that they didn't require further teaching on it. So, like Jesus said and we read in other places, there will be a general slide among the world's population into rebellion against the Lord Jesus which will get gradually worse over time until those in this final generation will be openly rebellious to the point where their character will be described as defectors from the Lord Jesus and His gospel.

b. The man of lawlessness. The word “lawless” describes willful opposition to God as well as a sinful condition. Because of his opposition to God, he is also a “son of destruction”. Now while Paul didn't spend any real time on the apostasy, he spends a good deal of this section on this man of lawlessness. This is a justified as he is the leader of the global rebellion against God. Look at how he is described.

Q: What is the first set of behaviors this man of lawlessness exhibits? (*v.4 - he opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship. He arrogantly attempts to usurp the very power and position on the one true God, and really every other god as well. It is self-exaltation. The tense of the verb “exalt” is “middle” which means it is an action the person does to himself. In this case the man of lawlessness exalts himself into this position of authority.*)

2) Once this man of lawlessness has exalted himself as god, he will seat himself in the temple. “Temple” means the most holy part of the temple complex. By this symbolic act, he is proclaiming himself to be god. (As a historical side-note here the Emperor Caligula planned to take over the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and erect a statue of himself depicted as Zeus. This was around 40 AD. It was never carried out as he was advised doing so would set the area ablaze in rebellion and destroy the economy in that Judea.)

a) Notice v.3 - that this man of lawlessness is revealed. This is his parousia or coming into the world. It is the devil's imitation or counterfeit revealing of a godlike being to deceive the world. Again he preempts Christ's true second coming by pretending to be god in the flesh. The word revealed means to “take the cover off”.

b) The language used here shows that this devilish imitation is nothing less than a rival messiah or antichrist. **Read I John 2:18-19** - these antichrists come from the church but aren't genuine and leave it. Jesus told a parable in **Matthew 13** (13:24-30, 36-43) about a man who planted wheat in his field but an enemy came one night and planted weeds in the same field.

When this became evident, the master of the field instructed his servants to not dig up the weeds at this time for fear of upsetting the wheat. Rather, they were to wait until the harvest and then separate the weeds from the wheat at that time - the weeds to be burned and the wheat to be brought into the master's storehouse. This parable shows us that both the lost and saved will be present together in the same field (the same churches). However, it will be at the second coming of Christ when the two will be separated and assigned to their different eternal locations.

c) Does the reference to the "temple" mean that a rebuilt temple has to happen before Christ can return? There is no Jewish temple now. For salvation or God's will a temple is not only NOT needed but also against God's will. The ultimate and final sacrifice has already been offered in Jesus Christ. Any further sacrifice is meaningless and distracts from the truth. (Like a seminary professor of mine said when asked about this in class, "There are so many people who believe that a temple has to be rebuilt that one will probably be rebuilt but it won't be part of God's plan.) While there are no end to the various theories on what this really means and a physical temple is certainly one explanation of what Paul meant in this verse, here's my thought:

1) Throughout the New Testament, believers are the temple of God. (**I Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20, Ephesians 2:21**) Our hearts are where God dwells now - not brick and mortar.

2) In a parallel passage in Revelation discussing the "Beast" (the man of lawlessness, the antichrist) we are told that he will blaspheme against God and against His tabernacle, which is those who are in heaven (the spirits of the saints). **Read Revelation 13:5-7.**

3) We know that the Lord wants us to love Him with our whole hearts. That He wants to be our first and foremost love and loyalty in our hearts. Thus, would it be any different for the antichrist to want to be the highest love and loyalty to his followers - false worship. In other words, this man of lawlessness will take the place where people should have God - he'll make a play for the hearts of mankind. Thus, there is no physical building that is needed to be rebuilt in order for this to happen. Keep in mind that Satan's main goal is to reveal him to be god to man, in a final attempt to deceive as many as possible before Christ's true second coming.

3. Thus, in order for Christ to come back there will be an apostasy and then the man of lawlessness will appear.

B. [II Thessalonians 2:5-12]

1. Paul begins to give the Thessalonian believers additional information concerning the man of lawlessness including why he hasn't been revealed yet. One of the important observations about this passage is that becomes vague or spotty on some points because Paul knew the Thessalonians already knew what they needed to know on the subject.

a. The first thing Paul discusses additionally is what is restraining the man of lawlessness from being revealed. Notice, that Paul is reminding them of what he told them. Unfortunately for us, he doesn't tell them again - thus - we don't know this information and can only guess.

1) V. 7 - The secret power of lawlessness is already at work in the world (mystery).

2) It is currently operating in a manner which is restrained in some manner.

3) However, at some point in the future, he will be revealed and will act unrestrained for a brief period of time.

4) The man of lawlessness will then be overthrown and destroyed by the far

greater power of and splendor of Christ's true second coming (parousia).

b. Now let's go back and flesh out this outline with what we can know and what we cannot know from this passage.

1) There are two immediate traps that many genuine believers fall into when attempting to interpret this passage: They want to speculate on the identity of the antichrist and they want to speculate on what or who is restraining him from coming to power presently.

a) There is no way to know either with any Biblical certainty. The identity of the antichrist has been thrown around since Paul's day and time. It has been suggested that it is the pope, a president or other super-powerful political or religious leader, or a Roman emperor, the Jewish national state, etc. The thing is there just isn't enough information given Biblically to identify him with any certainty. However, we are told that when he is revealed, we will know without a doubt who it is. Preemptive guessing is a waste of time and energy.

b) As to what or who restrains the antichrist from being revealed now, we face the exact same temptation and dilemma.

1) There just isn't enough Biblical information to come to a decisive, satisfying answer. Is this the force of the gospel, is it the Holy Spirit or the archangel Michael? The list of possibilities goes on and on.

2) Notice the words used in vv. 6-7. In v.6 the word is "what". An object or force is what is restraining the revelation of the antichrist. In v.7 the word is "he". "he who now restrains... until he is taken out of the way." What did Paul have in mind that he could refer to it in both impersonal (neuter) and personal (masculine) terms? While the only consensus of what or who this could be is that it is a force for good and not evil (as some theories state) the rest is conjecture and even as far back as Augustine somewhere around 400 AD admitted that it was too obscure to know for certain. The deal is that Paul knew the Thessalonians knew what he meant so that's why he didn't feel the need to go into detail on this. It's a waste of time and energy to get bent out of shape on it as we don't need to know. When the man of lawlessness is revealed, we'll recognize him and his activities and know that whatever was restraining him has been taken out of his way. What we need to know now is that there is a power coming from a being who is restraining the antichrist from appearing earlier than God's timing. This restraining force and entity probably won't be revealed until after Christ's return as it is a spiritual force and being.

2) What is most important to Paul is that the man of lawlessness' reign of terror will be brief and that the Lord second coming will put a speedy end to him once and for all. The antichrist is brought to an end by Christ's appearance - the real revealing of Christ.

3) Now Paul turns to the activities the man of lawlessness.

Q: According to v.9, who's activity is the man of lawlessness in accordance with? (*Satan's- Just as Christ's coming was in perfect agreement with the work of the Heavenly Father, so the antichrist's coming will be in perfect agreement with the work and goals of Satan.*)

a. The man of lawlessness will conduct many signs and false wonders. The question is this: are the wonders false because they don't originate from God but rather from Satan or are they false in the sense that they are tricks or illusions that appear as miracles but are gimmicks? Since the same three words are used to describe Jesus' miracles, it's likely that these are genuine

miracles just done by Satan's power. This issue is the result. The lost masses will believe them to be of God and follow the person.

b. These false wonders are for the purpose of evil and deceit. (v.10) While Satan is the originator of the signs and false wonders, the effect is what is stated in v.10 - deception of those who are perishing. His appearance will be grand. It will be full of pomp and pageantry, it will be short-lived as he is a son of destruction (v.3).

4) The last thing Paul mentions is those who will be perishing. Again, when you read vv. 11-12 the temptation is to think that God is unjust because He is causing these people to believe a lie and not giving them a chance to know the truth. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. The deluding influence is a result of their continued sin and refusal to receive the truth of the gospel (v. 10).

Q: What are the three events we've discussed so far in this study must happen before Christ's return? (One of them comes from an earlier week.) (The apostasy, the revealing of the man of lawlessness, and the gospel will be spread to the whole world. (**Matthew 24:14**)).

Clear Teachings from II Thessalonians 1:5-2:12

1. On the day when Jesus returns, God will deal out retribution to the lost who do not know God and will comfort and transform believers by revealing Christ in them. The saints will be glorified.
2. Mighty angels in flaming fire will accompany Christ at His return.
3. The day of the Lord will come only after the apostasy comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed.
4. The man of lawlessness will set himself up as god and will perform many false wonders, and signs by the power of Satan. He will deceive all those who are not saved.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?