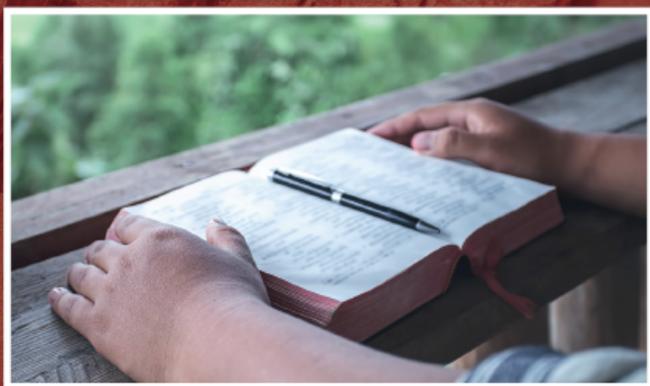


THE SECOND LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS



An Explanation of This Letter
Especially for You

Ger de Koning

ROCK
SOLID
7

**The Second Letter
to the Thessalonians**

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An Explanation of This Letter
Especially for You

Rock Solid #7 (Part II)

Ger de Koning

The original Dutch version is available at
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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah
Nah – Nahum
Hab – Habakkuk
Zep – Zephaniah
Hag – Haggai
Zec – Zechariah
Mal – Malachi

New Testament

Mt – Gospel of Matthew
Mk – Gospel of Mark
Lk – Gospel of Luke
Jn – Gospel of John
Acts – Acts of the Apostles
Rom – Letter to the Romans
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal – Letter to the Galatians
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians
Phil – Letter to the Philippians
Col – Letter to the Colossians
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy
Tit – Letter to Titus
Phlm – Letter to Philemon
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews
Jam – Letter of James
1Pet – First Letter of Peter
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter
1Jn – First Letter of John
2Jn – Second Letter of John
3Jn – Third Letter of John
Jude – Letter of Jude
Rev – Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When ASTERISKS * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The Second Letter to the Thessalonians

Introduction

As it is noticed in the introduction of the first letter, the two letters that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians belong to the first inspired letters that he wrote. He wrote the first letter as a supplement to what he had already said to them orally. In that way he provided them with the knowledge they were in need of.

The second letter has apparently been written not long after the first one. Those addressed are still young in the faith and therefore easy to be deceived by false teachers, especially with regard to questions about the coming of the Lord. Against the work of the enemy Paul assures them in this letter that the day of the Lord has not come yet. His second letter is therefore correcting. He unmasks the false doctrine and prevents that their faith will suffer shipwreck. False doctrines, including that on the return of Christ, always undermine the faith. On top of that, false doctrines also unchangeably lead to a wrong practice.

The central theme in both letters is the return of Christ. In the first letter questions are being dealt with about the passed away believers. In that letter Paul speaks about the mystery of the rapture of the church and the Old Testament believers. First the believers are caught up into heaven and afterward they form the company of the Lord Jesus when He returns to the earth. First the Lord will come for His own, then He will come with His own. When He appears with His own, the full day of the millennial kingdom of peace, about which many prophets wrote, will dawn.

In the second letter questions are dealt with regarding the living believers on earth. The reason is that there was commotion about the tribulation that they were suffering. They had heard wrong explanations about it. That had caused them to become insecure. They had heard that tribulations belong to the day of the Lord, something that is right in itself. However, the false teachers misused this and said: 'Our tribulations are the proof that the day of the Lord has come.' In this second letter Paul will explain

what that particular day means. Because this subject is important to the believers of the church of all times, God took care that this letter has been included in the Bible.

The main theme of the letter, which is just mentioned, has the central place. Next to that Paul will also deal with the wrong practice of some who did not want to work for their livelihood. Such believers damage the Christian testimony which the Thessalonians want to form. This behavior has to be corrected. Paul gives instructions how to do that. He opens and closes his letter with a blessing.

2 Thessalonians 1

2Thes 1:1-3 | Blessing and Giving Thanks

1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 2 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is [only] fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows [ever] greater;

V1. The salutation of this verse is almost the same as the salutation of the first verse of the first letter. Verse 2 is written only in the salutation of this second letter. Although Paul, Silvanus and Timothy are mentioned as senders, Paul is still the main author. That clearly appears from his greeting at the end of the letter (2Thes 3:17). He does not present himself as an apostle. That is for the same reason as in his first letter: the emphasis is more on encouragement and loving trust than on the admonition.

The letter is not addressed to the church in Thessalonica, but “to the church of the Thessalonians”. In that way the emphasis falls on the believers who form together the church in that particular place. For these young believers it is a great encouragement. That encouragement is being underlined by the addition that they are seen “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”. In the original we have a small difference with the first letter: the word ‘in’ is found here both before ‘God our Father’ and before ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’. In that way attention is paid to both Persons of the Godhead in their full meaning.

Regarding ‘in God our Father’ you may think as a young believer of the special sphere and relation into which you have been introduced as a Christian. Due to your being born again you have become a child of God. At that same moment of your new birth the Father has adopted you as a son. That is the great result of your conversion when it comes down to your relation to God the Father, while the word “in” indicates the most intimate relationship.

You are also 'in the Lord Jesus Christ'. Hereby you may think as a young believer of Him Who has become the Lord of your life, but Who also has control over all things. He is also Jesus, the Man Who has lived on earth and therefore knows from experience what you are going through. He is also Christ, which is God's Anointed One. In Him you have been blessed with all spiritual blessing. Isn't it great for you to realize that?

V2. Then the apostle does not wish the believers honor, riches, happiness and such things, but "grace" and "peace". And totally in line with the previously said, he relates his wish again with both Divine Persons. The Thessalonians may know to be safe and secure in both these Persons. They may also know that both Persons are the source of grace and peace for the life on earth.

First grace and then peace. If you consider that God's grace has provided for everything and will provide for everything, you will be able to go your way with the peace of God in your heart. That is wished to you together with those with whom you form the local church. Also in order for a church to be able to be like God has purposed it to be, grace and peace are needed more than ever.

V3. After his blessing Paul lets them know that he is giving thanks for them. He knows why. The reasons are their "faith" and their "love". These aspects were found with them that strongly and abundantly, that he couldn't help but give thanks to God for that. This says something about the faith life of the Thessalonians, but also a lot about the heart of the apostle. You yourself have to be living closely to the Lord in order to notice faith and love with others. If you notice that, it cannot be otherwise but your heart will turn to God and give thanks to Him for that.

You are in fact obliged to, for what you observe is the work of God in the life of believers. God is revealing Himself in them and it is a great encouragement for you that God wants to show that, to make you partake of that. You are enjoying something that God enjoys. That's what we call fellowship with God. We may ask the Lord for us to see better what He works in believers.

Their faith "is greatly enlarged", which means they were growing in trusting God. The enemy wants to work by tribulation that the believer gives

up his faith in God. He did not succeed in that with the Thessalonians. The tribulation only drove them out to God even more. Neither did the enemy succeed in drifting the believers apart. Through the tribulation he tries to make everyone to be busy with one's own need and have no time left for helping others. When the trust in God enlarges, also "the love of each one ... toward one another grows [ever] greater". This is how it works in the kingdom of God.

You see that the apostle noticed their spiritual growth. In his first letter he expressed the wish that they may increase in love for one another (1Thes 3:12). He also exhorted them to abound in pleasing God in loving one another (1Thes 4:1,10). Here he comes back to that and mentions that he gives thanks to God for answering his prayer and the result of his admonition.

In the words "each one of you toward one another" it is strongly expressed that each individual is addressed personally, while they also form a whole together. This whole can only function well if each member makes an effort for the other. This reciprocity is of great importance. We need one another in a local church. The one cannot do without the other. When the love of each of the whole flows to the other, the whole will become a strong formation by which the Lord Jesus becomes visible. Besides, love is not 'being kind'. True love will proceed to admonition if things that attack God's work happen or threaten to happen.

If you compare verse 3 with the third verse of 1 Thessalonians 1 (1Thes 1:3) it is striking that the hope which is called there together with faith and love, is not mentioned here. Would that mean that the longing for the coming of the Lord Jesus was beginning to fade? That is very possible, for they had become insecure with regard to their expectation of the future. They were not sure anymore about everything. Therefore this letter is so important. It becomes clear again what you should beware of when it is about the coming of the Lord.

But remember in everything that knowing the truths and having insight in the order of the events will only have a good result if to you it is all about Christ.

Now read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-3 again.

Reflection: What makes this letter important for you?

2Thes 1:4-7 | The Afflicted and Those Who Afflict

4 therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. 5 [This is] a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. 6 For after all it is [only] just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and [to give] relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,

V4. It must have done the Thessalonians good that Paul spoke proudly of them among other churches of God. They themselves were not displaying their great efforts for the Lord. That would of course be inappropriate (Pro 27:2). They must have known their own weakness. You maybe know such people who always talk about their great life with the Lord. They tell impressive stories about their spiritual mind and the special things that the Lord shows them. That is pure arrogance.

Paul wants to encourage the believers and not flatter them (1Thes 2:5). It is a good thing to encourage believers who are suffering, which was the case with the Thessalonians. The Thessalonians were persecuted and afflicted. With "persecutions" you should consider that those who were persecuted were being chased, that they were not given any place of rest. "Afflictions" is the physical and spiritual suffering which they experienced from their persecutors. At the moment that Paul is writing this they were facing this suffering. You can derive it from the word "endure". That is written in the present tense.

When I try to say something about this, I feel insignificant and therefore quite incapable. What do I, who live in a continent where this is not to be found (yet?) know of persecution and affliction? Paul on the contrary knew what he was talking about (1Cor 4:12). He could stand next to them as a "brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation" (Rev 1:9). We will surely experience tribulation if we really want to live for the Lord (2Tim 2:12).

He can talk about their "perseverance and faith". These two belong together. On the one hand 'perseverance' is the result of the testing of the faith (Jam 1:3). On the other hand 'faith' is needed to persevere. You also come

across this combination in Revelation 13 (Rev 13:10). There it is also about a time when faith is severely tested because of persecutions.

Through this letter the proudly speaking about their perseverance and faith is also addressed to the churches of God of today. Therefore the perseverance and the faith of the Thessalonians are still an encouragement for you and me and for the local church where we are. You see that it is possible to keep on going, even if you are young in the faith.

Although we are not dealing with the kind of violent persecution to which the Thessalonians were exposed, it is good and important to know why God allows it that His children are being persecuted. Indeed, wrong conclusions are possible that seriously damage the life of faith. You may have heard – even possibly you thought yourself – that when something terrible happens to a person, it must be God’s punishment for a certain sin.

In such cases there is a wrong picture of the way God deals with His children. This is the idea that the friends of Job had when they saw his suffering. They thought that the suffering of Job was the consequence of sins that he must have done. At the end of the book of Job you can read how God judges their idea (Job 42:7-8). In this way I am not trying to say that suffering could never be a consequence of a sin that has been done. I only want to say that it is not up to us to explain the suffering that happens to a person.

V5. The suffering that the Thessalonians were enduring was the contrary of God’s dissatisfaction. It was absolutely a proof of God’s pleasure in them. He considered them “worthy of” His kingdom. The kingdom is as it were the reward for them who faithfully serve God in a time that nothing was to be seen yet of His kingdom in public glory.

The suffering was God’s tribute to them. The tribulations are the proof that God was standing on their side. Otherwise satan would surely not have considered them to be worthy of persecuting them. Persecution absolutely goes together with entering the kingdom (Acts 14:22). It is always: first suffering and then glory (Lk 24:26; 1Pet 1:11).

V6. Now that Paul has explained the real meaning of tribulation to them, he points out the great difference between the afflicted and those who are afflicting now and in the future, at the coming of the Lord Jesus. God

judges righteously. That refers to the fact that with Him there is no respect of persons as well as to the fact that God discerns in a perfectly righteous way between the afflicted and those who are afflicting. He perfectly knows everyone's circumstances and responsibility.

It looks like the ones who are afflicting can go ahead uninterrupted. But do not think that God doesn't notice this. When He deals with the case, He will revenge those who have afflicted His children. That means that the day of the Lord cannot possibly have come yet. Do you think that there can still be mention of people who do evil to His children when God executes His rights? Where ungodly men are in control, there cannot possibly be mention of the day of the Lord.

V7. When the Lord Jesus will be revealed, when He appears, with in His company "His mighty angels", the roles will be reversed. Those who have afflicted will get the punishment according to their deeds and the afflicted will get rest. That rest begins when the Lord Jesus has defeated all opponents. 'His mighty angels' enlarge the majesty of His performance. It is the angels through whom He exercises His power (Psa 103:20).

Each of those who have afflicted will fade by that view. Each afflicted believer will breathe a sigh of relief. Then persecutions and afflictions will be over, without any chance of repetition. For the persecuted and afflicted believer a rest will begin which will never be interrupted. That's because that rest is anchored in and assured by the Lord Jesus.

Paul was looking forward to enjoy that rest together with his afflicted loved ones in Thessalonica. He and they and all believers who have fallen asleep have entered into the rest. That will also be the case with us when the Lord comes for the church. Paul has written to them about that in his first letter (1Thes 4:15-17).

In a kind of parenthesis Paul has pointed the Thessalonians to the rest which is ahead for them. Then he continues with what the coming of the Lord Jesus would mean for those who have afflicted. That is the main subject, for the Thessalonians were wondering how they were supposed to consider the afflictions that they had to go through. Due to the wrong teachings that were circulating among them, the idea that the day of the Lord has come, has gained ground. For that day would be accompanied

by tribulation and oppressiveness, would it not? Is that not what they are going through now?

Well, Paul says, when the Lord Jesus comes, it will certainly be accompanied by tribulation and oppressiveness, but not for you! The revelation of the Lord Jesus will be a terror for those who are persecuting you now. The “flaming fire” that will accompany Him, is not meant for you, but for those who persecute and afflict you.

The fire is the instrument of His judgment (Lev 10:2; Psa 97:3). His consuming fire will strike them as His revenge. He has promised that He would do that when He told you not to take revenge yourself (Rom 12:19). Let that also be an exhortation for you not to revenge the evil that is being done to you.

You read in the Old Testament that “the LORD will come in fire” (Isa 66:15). Here you read that again of the Lord Jesus. One more proof that the Lord Jesus is the same as the LORD (Yahweh) in the Old Testament. It also shows that God, Who is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29), is executing His judgment by His Son (Acts 17:31; Jn 5:27).

Now read 2 Thessalonians 1:4-8 again.

Reflection: How do you experience ‘the righteous judgment of God’?

2Thes 1:8-12 | Eternal Destruction and Glory

8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed. 11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and [the] Lord Jesus Christ.

V8. When the Lord Jesus appeared on earth the first time, He did that as a helpless Baby. He was also not accompanied by an impressive army. Yes, there was surely a crowd of angels present, but they were not standing there with a sword ready to protect the Child. They did something else: they praised God (Lk 2:13-14). When the Lord Jesus will appear on earth for the second time, there will be no weakness and vulnerability to be seen. On the contrary: the manger will then be changed into a flaming fire; the praising crowd of angels will be changed into an army in order to deal out retribution.

The Lord Jesus will then not come to look for and save the lost. He did that when He came the first time (Lk 19:10). And this is how He is still to be presented to sinners around you. But when He comes the second time, it will be to deal out retribution. And that's the way He is supposed to be presented too.

The objects of His retribution are falling apart into two groups. The repeated words "to those" indicate that it is about two categories. Of the one group is said that they "do not know God". Of the other group is said that they "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus". The indication of each of both groups includes at the same time the reason why the dealing out of retribution will come over them. The first reason is general and applies to each sinner. The second reason regards a special category of sinners and particularly those to whom the gospel came, but who rejected it. The retribution will be dealt out to the unbelievers and those who are disobedient.

Not knowing God is a guilty unfamiliarity with God. Even if no one has told them about God, they still could have seen in the nature around them that there is a Creator (Rom 1:18-20). But they refuse to. They do not want to know Him. They do not want to have anything to do with God. The main reason of the punishment they will have to face, is their denial of God. That's the reason why they go beyond all kinds of violence, lies and destruction, and they persecute and afflict the believers.

By speaking out this judgment, Paul relates to the call of the God-fearing ones from the Old Testament (Psa 79:6; Jer 10:25). It is not that Paul himself is asking for it, but this dealing out of retribution by the Lord Jesus will meet the desire of the God-fearing afflicted ones who will live after the rapture of the church.

The second group of people has an even greater responsibility. God has offered them the gospel with the urgent request to accept it, but they refused to listen to it. To believe and obey the gospel is a command (Rom 10:16; 1Pet 4:17). Therefore there is mention of "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5; 16:26). Not believing is disobedience, which is a fatal disobedience. For actually in the gospel the Son of God has been presented to them. To be disobedient to Him means partaking of the wrath of God (Jn 3:36).

You hear the great love of the apostle for the Lord Jesus when he writes about "our Lord Jesus". It hurts him that He is being rejected like that. Although he could see much fruit of his work, he also had often experienced that the Lord was haughtily and contemptuously rejected. He has experienced himself the hatred against that Name. He has suffered a lot for that Name's sake (Acts 9:16). He knows that everything that was done to him, was against the Lord Jesus. But the haters and despisers will surely not escape their retribution.

V9. Although the two groups are different in their denial of God, they will suffer the same terrible fate. The penalty for both is the eternal destruction. This is the only fitting, completely righteous penalty which is in full accordance with the guilt that they have. "Eternal" is opposed to temporary and it means without end, everlasting. "Destruction" does not mean elimination in the sense of ceasing to exist, but the end of the meaning of

existence. If something is destructed it cannot be used anymore and it is thrown away.

Destruction implies that a person has been removed from the Lord. Everyone who has been thrown away, will end up into "the outer darkness" (Mt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). The Lord is the source of all light, life and blessing. To be eternally outside of that source will be an unprecedented torture in the darkness, death and curse. Man has been created to be in relationship with God. Once all connection has been broken, man will be completely lost. What a contrast with seeing the face of God, which is the highest joy of the believer (Psa 17:15; Rev 22:4).

To the unbelievers that glory means terror (Isa 2:10,19,21). When the Lord will come in that majesty, they will be removed by it. They also will not see anything of the outer and visible display of the glory of His strength which will be noticeable all over the earth when He will be reigning. You get an impression of that already in the transfiguration on the mountain (Mt 17:2; 2Pet 1:16-18).

V10. The terrible day for the unconverted is the great day for the believers. They are "His saints", the ones who have been set apart for Him. "In" (not: by) them He will "be glorified", which means in the glorified body which they have and in which they will be like Him.

He will also "be marveled at among those who have believed". That reminds us of the time when they were on earth and went their way in the confidence of faith in Him. That delivered them misunderstanding and mockery back then, even persecution and martyr's death. Then it will become clear in Whom they have believed and trusted, right through everything and Whom they have held on to.

What they have then displayed of the power of faith will openly be seen in their relation to Him. Then there will be admiration for Him Who had so much power of attraction for the ones who were despised then, that they were willing to suffer anything for Him.

The testimony that the apostle bore in Thessalonica was believed by them, while many of their fellow citizens had rejected it. Because they had believed it, they will partake of that great day of the Lord, while such a terrible judgment will come over their fellow citizens. Do you see what

part you have obtained due to the faith and what you will escape? Isn't that a great grace?

V11. But there is still a way to go. You are still not there yet. That time has not come yet. That's the reason for the prayer of the apostle. His prayer is that they – in order to contribute to the glorification of the Lord in that day – will be “worthy of” their “calling”. In order to do that, they will have to be faithfully going their way until the end, with full commitment.

Note that it is not about you to be made worthy. You are already worthy. But therefore it can be expected of you that you respond to that dignity. You do that by persevering until the end. Don't you think that it is worth all the trouble if you consider that end?

You may possibly be overwhelmed now by a feeling of weakness, maybe even powerlessness. Then Paul is telling you also about the other side, which is God's side, about what He is doing. You do not need to achieve the end by your own power. He works in you the desire to do the good. He also empowers your faith, so that you may do the works of faith. He will make sure that you will continue to trust in Him up to the end (cf. Lk 22:32).

V12. His work in you is related to the honor of His Son. If you live like that, the Name of the Lord Jesus will be glorified in you now already and you will be glorified in Him. You will be radiating a glory which is not yours, but His (cf. Jn 17:22-23).

You absolutely do not owe it to yourself. Nothing other than “the grace of our God and [the] Lord Jesus” can cause something like that to happen.

Now read 2 Thessalonians 1:8-12 again.

Reflection: Pray that God may count you and others (mention them by name) worthy of the calling. Allow Him to do His work in you and in those others. Consider that it is all about the glory of the Name of the Lord Jesus in your life and theirs.

2 Thessalonians 2

2Thes 2:1-4 | How to Recognize the Day of the Lord

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. 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.

As it is already said in the introduction, the emphasis in this second letter lies on correction. That was needed because the enemy was trying to paralyze the lives of the believers. In order to succeed, he makes use of false teachings. He wants to create the right climate through the persecutions and tribulations so that he can introduce those false teachings.

You have seen the tribulations in chapter 1. Paul made clear there how to confront them and he encouraged the believers on that by his teaching. In this chapter the false teachings will be dealt with how the tempter and deceiver wants to deceive the believers with a false message on the future. Paul clarifies how you should approach it. Besides, in both chapters you see the two forms of appearance of the enemy: in chapter 1 the ‘roaring lion’ (1Pet 5:8) and in chapter 2 the ‘angel of light’ (2Cor 11:14).

The false teaching consisted of the guile of the enemy to fool the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord had already come. The enemy had even spread the rumor that Paul himself believes and teaches that. Now you should pay careful attention that Paul fights and reproofs this false teaching by placing the truth opposite it.

V1. He does not issue an order. He even less blames them to be so stupid for giving room to the enemy for his false teachings. No, he starts with “requesting” them. In that way he wants to make them ponder on what he was going to say and what the main theme of his letter will be. Then

he places himself in their midst, and not above them, by addressing them again with the familiar and confidential word “brethren”.

His starting point for reproof the false teaching and the presentation of the truth is the coming of the Lord Jesus for His own. That’s what he means by “with regard to”. With that he says: ‘In order to make clear to you what the day of the Lord consists of, I want to remind you for a moment of the rapture of the believers.’ He is saying as it were to them: ‘Haven’t I told you that the Lord Jesus will come for His own first and that we will meet Him in the air, so that we are gathered together to Him (1Thes 4:15-17)? You, who belong to Him, are still on earth. How could it be that the day of the Lord has come already, while the church is still on the earth? The coming of the Lord Jesus for those who are His is still to take place. Therefore there is no reason to accept that the day of the Lord has already come.’

V2. Don’t let yourself be fooled about anything. It is the intention of the enemy to keep you, and every child of God, away from focusing your eyes surely and firmly on the personal coming of the Lord Jesus in the air to take up His own to be with Him. He uses all kinds of deceptions and tricks to succeed. He attacks you in your thinking, your mind, your capability to judge things. You should not be so easily led astray.

Think about everything that you hear or see and judge the things according to the Word of God. Then you will not be shocked easily by certain events that are explained by false teachers as God’s actions. Neither will you be easily confused and excited by their fine statements.

They claim to have received a message by inspiration. But it is impossible that God’s Spirit is at work here. God’s Spirit is always in accordance with God’s Word. Therefore the spirits are to be tested according to God’s Word (1Jn 4:1). Therefore, don’t let yourself be surprised by their so-called ‘spiritual’ contacts. Don’t let yourself be deprived by their convincing-sounding reasoning. You must examine what they say on the basis of God’s Word.

Even if they would come to you with a letter, a document of which they claim to be coming from an authority in religious matters, don’t let yourself be confused by it. Satan doesn’t care about which means he should use, as long as it is effective, as long as it results in having the Thessalonians think that the day of the Lord has come.

A wrong translation of this phrase is: 'As the day of Christ is at hand' (KJV). That wouldn't be an error, for that day is indeed at hand. But the error that had found entrance was precisely that it had come now already. The proof of that, claimed by the deceivers, are the persecutions which the Thessalonians have to endure. That day is accompanied by tribulation after all, is it not? The suffering which they are enduring seem to be a confirmation to the deceivers. Is it not written that that day would be a day of fear and terror?

V3. There are two arguments to reproof the error that the day of the Lord has come already. You just got the first argument: the believers have not been united with the Lord yet, for only after that He will come together with them to the earth. The second argument is that the "lawless one" (verse 8) has not been revealed yet and therefore the judgment cannot be executed yet.

This second argument Paul now explains. If you understand that and hold on to it, the enemy will in no way be able to confuse you anymore about it. The first that Paul points to is "the apostasy", which is the spiritual climate that will prevail after the rapture of the believers. That apostasy is the public denial of something that was formerly professed. Here it is about the apostasy of Christendom as the only religion in which God has revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the radical denial that there is a supreme Being beyond man, to Whom man should subject himself. The apostasy means that man arrogates to himself the absolute authority in the world and in the universe.

To prevent a misconception, it is good for you to know that 'the apostasy' is not the apostasy of the believer, the born again Christian. The believer cannot become an apostate. The Lord Jesus has given the assurance of that (Jn 10:27-29). It is true that in the time in which we live, the "later times", "some will fall away from the faith" (1Tim 4:1). That regards people who hold to a form of godliness, which means people who are not born again Christians (2Tim 3:5). That is not the same as the general apostasy of the whole that calls itself Christian. Apostasy does not mean that the love of certain people is growing cold or the introduction of evil things in the church, but it is fully giving up the truth of God. Apostasy means that man dethrones God and puts himself on the throne.

The stage in which all Christians will apostatize is still to come. The apostasy only starts when the rapture of the church has happened and when only nominal Christians are left on earth. That what will then be called Christianity will completely fall away. In the spiritual climate that will then prevail, a person will emerge who is the embodiment of the rebellion against God. This person is the concentration of all lawlessness. He is called “the man of sin” and “the son of destruction”.

Sin has absolute authority over this man. Sin has the unlimited and unrestrained disposal over this man. There is in no way any connection with God or something that comes from God. This person has surrendered himself to sin as a willing instrument, so that sin can reveal itself in all its horror in him.

Such a person cannot possibly be any one else than ‘the son of destruction’. This is how Judas is also called by the Lord Jesus (Jn 17:12). This name is an indicator of the character. You also read for instance about “a son of peace” (Lk 10:6) as someone who is characterized by peace, who, as it were, has peace as his father, which his character shows. ‘The son of destruction’ finds its origin in destruction, his actions are characterized by destruction and his end is in destruction.

V4. However, before he reaches his end, he will draw all spiritual leadership to himself. The person of the antichrist will be revealed. This is the person who is indicated in Daniel 11 as “the king” who “will do as he pleases” (Dan 11:36). Paul quotes that verse here. From that verse it also appears that the antichrist is a Jew.

In the New Testament you see him as the apostate leader of Christendom – he denies the Father and the Son – and of Judaism – he denies that Jesus is the Christ (1Jn 2:22-23). In Revelation 13 you see him as the beast coming up out of the earth (Rev 13:11-18). The description shows similarity with Christ as the Lamb. The antichrist is imitating Him, He pretends to be the Christ, but is in all views the opponent of Christ.

When he will be reigning, he will prohibit every form of religion. In that way he will open the way for an unprecedented blasphemous performance: he will oblige all Jews and nominal Christians to honor him as God (cf. Eze 28:2). Therefore he will take his seat in the temple of God, which

is the temple in Jerusalem, the religious center of the Jews. The antichrist will take care that the dictator of the restored Roman Empire will be worshiped. Therefore he will make an image of that dictator and will place it in the temple where it can be worshiped (Rev 13:14-15).

That he takes his seat in the temple, proves once again that the antichrist is a Jew. The (apostate) Jews would otherwise never accept him as christ or messiah and also not allow him to take possession of the temple of God. The Lord Jesus has said of him that he will come in his own name and that the Jews will accept him (Jn 5:43).

Now read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 again.

Reflection: Which proofs do you find in this portion that the day of the Lord has not come yet?

2Thes 2:5-8 | That Lawless One

5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? 6 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains [will do so] until he is taken out of the way. 8 Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;

V5. In the previous verses Paul actually did not do much more than remind the believers in Thessalonica of what he had told them earlier. Apparently this subject belongs to the basic equipment of each believer. He will not have gone deeper into that, for he only stayed with them for a short time. Nevertheless he points out to them what he had then said and in that way wants to refresh their memory.

It is surely not the case that Paul has mentioned this subject just in passing. You cannot see it in this translation, but he says that he has repeatedly mentioned this subject. Therefore it includes an undertone of reprimand. If they had understood what he had said, they would not have had the difficulties that they now have in the circumstances they found themselves. Due to the ‘forgetfulness’ of the Thessalonians we may now profit from the teaching on the future.

V6-7. Paul continues with his teaching. He thereby connects to the knowledge he assumed they had. They knew that the revelation of the antichrist was being restrained. This being restrained happens by a “what” (verse 6) and a “who” (verse 7). There is ‘something’ that restrains and ‘someone’, a person, who restrains. The question is to ‘what’ and ‘whom’ we should think of, what is meant by it. Several interpreters put forward several solutions. I would like to tell you which one appeals the most to me and why.

“What restrains him” is the church. Paul has said that as long as the church is on earth, the day of the Lord could not possibly have already come. He has also said that, before the day of the Lord comes, the apostasy, which is in relation with the public revelation of the antichrist, must come first. But the presence of the church on earth means that there is still no general denial of God and Christ.

“He who now restrains”, is the Holy Spirit. That it is a reference to the Holy Spirit, is clear to me because following that is written “until he is taken out of the way”. When the church will be taken out of the way, the Holy Spirit also will be taken out of the way. Will He then be no more on earth? He surely will, but not in the same way as when the church was on the earth. Then He dwelled in the church. On the day of Pentecost, at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, He came to dwell in the believers.

Before that time He worked on earth. You can already read about that in the first verses of the Bible (Gen 1:2). Each work of God on earth happened, and is still happening, by the Holy Spirit. But only after the Lord Jesus had ascended to heaven after the accomplishment of the work on the cross, the Spirit came to dwell (Jn 7:39) on earth. How that has happened you can read in Acts 2 (Acts 2:1-4). His coming to the earth was the beginning of the church. His dwelling place is the church (1Cor 3:16; Eph 2:22). You see how much the church and the Holy Spirit are related with each other.

Due to the presence on earth of both the church and the Holy Spirit, the full revelation of the evil is still being restrained. An example of that restraining is the failure of spiritualistic manifestations due to the presence of a praying believer. What also can happen is that an ungodly or nasty conversation stops when a committed believer joins the talkers of whom they know that he is a committed believer.

This ‘restraining’ stops when the church has been caught up to heaven. And when the church is caught up, it cannot be otherwise than that the Holy Spirit leaves the earth. The church is His dwelling place forever. A proof of that is to be found in what the Lord Jesus has said of the Holy Spirit, that He abides with and will be in the believers forever (Jn 14:15-17). When the church has been caught up into heaven, the Holy Spirit will not dwell on earth anymore. As far as His work is concerned, it will be again as it was in the time before the church was on earth.

The full revelation of evil is therefore being restrained. But “the mystery of lawlessness” is already at work. To those who are blind to it, the unbelievers, it is still a ‘mystery’. The unbelievers even cooperate massively with the lawlessness. To you it doesn’t have to be a mystery. You may take to heart what Paul says here about this phenomenon. The reason that it un-

fortunately is still a mystery to many believers is because they do not read the Scripture. If you do read the Scripture, then this increasing lawlessness doesn't have to be surprising to you.

With lawlessness you must not think just of breaking the law. Lawlessness goes far beyond that. Lawlessness is the essence of sin, for "sin is lawlessness" (1Jn 3:4). It is the complete denial of any form of authority. Is that not what you observe around you? Do you not notice that man wants to be autonomous, independent, self-reliant more and more? He is less and less willing to subject himself to authority and certainly not to God's authority.

V8. This work of 'the mystery of lawlessness' goes on until the man of sin, the lawless one, can fully reveal himself. Therefore, don't let yourself be deceived by voices who want to make you believe that the world will be won for Christ through the gospel. That is a great error. You read here what the future of the world looks like.

That doesn't mean that you should not proclaim the gospel. On the contrary, it is exactly an exhortation to do that. However, the gospel is for the individual and not for the mass. As it is said, the mass will fall away, will turn its back on God and worship the antichrist. "Then", this is how verse 8 begins. That means: at that moment and not earlier, the lawless one will be revealed. The lawlessness which is already at work mysteriously, will at that moment take shape in a person. It is the same as John writes about the many antichrists, while there is just only one who is the antichrist (1Jn 2:18). Everything happens according to God's plan. Satan and his demons can in no way change anything about that. No, the fact is even that they cooperate against their will to the fulfillment of it.

Once the lawless one has been revealed, it will be the beginning of a time of unprecedented terror on earth. You don't read anything about his rule of terror here. You can read it in the book of Revelation. Here you read briefly, and therefore impressive, about his inglorious, humiliating and horrible end. He does not come to an end by being defeated in a fight of life and death. The Lord Jesus will personally slay him by nothing more than the breath of His mouth (cf. Isa 11:4). You can also think of His Word, a word of power (Psa 33:6; Rev 1:16).

Imagine: There you have the lawless man who exalts himself above everything and has made himself God instead of being subjected to God. This puffed-up, bragging blasphemer will be slain by a simple – but oh, how full of power! – act. And by Whom? By the Man Who has first humbled Himself on earth and became obedient until death and Who afterward was glorified by God and became Lord of lords. His appearance, so when He comes visible on earth, means the end of the lawless one.

“To slay” and “bring to an end” do not mean the end of his existence. These words indicate that it is finished with his position and the exertion of his power. In Revelation 19 you see how that will happen (Rev 19:20). There the lawless one is called “the false prophet”. Together with the beast, that is the dictator of the restored Roman Empire (the united Europe), he is thrown into the lake of fire without trial. These two monstrous persons will come into hell as the first ones. They will also be the only ones there during the thousand years of peace that will follow on earth after their condemnation. When the thousand years will be over, then the devil will be thrown into it (Rev 20:10) and ultimately all the unbelievers (Rev 20:11-12,15).

Now read 2 Thessalonians 2:5-8 again.

Reflection: Mention situations wherein the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.

2Thes 2:9-12 | Those Who Perish

9 [that is], the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

V9. In these verses Paul tells some particularities about the antichrist. The antichrist is not only wicked and focused on himself, he is also the great deceiver. By displaying “power and signs and false wonders” he deceives those who have no life of God.

God also gives these observable manifestations. You can see them in the life of the Lord Jesus and His apostles and in the first church (Acts 2:22; Rom 15:19; 2Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4). The antichrist is therefore also a great imitator of the Lord Jesus. The source from which he draws his displays, is the lie. That means that satan is his inspirer, for satan is the father of lies (Jn 8:44). Satan tries everything to tempt people.

It is important to keep in mind that what at the beginning was meant for the benefit of the believers, served to emphasize the Word of God. The Word of God was not complete then. Now it has been completed we need no more confirmation through signs and wonders.

We are living in the time of faith, not of sight (2Cor 5:7). God is asking of each individual to have faith in His Word. You know that the period of faith is coming to an end. We are living in the later days. The coming apostasy is becoming more and more sharply outlined. A sign of that is the declining interest in God’s Word. That a huge number of people is buying modern, freely translated, easy reading Bible translations, is not a proof of a revival. It is rather a satisfaction of the human spiritual need. You are allowed to read the koran as well next to it. The language usage has been adjusted to the requirement of the time. And do you remember which particular time that is? Right – the end time.

Just take a look around you. The demand for visible and tangible elements that could be of help for the faith experience, is increasing. Christians, even true Christians, start to attach more and more importance to rituals

and relics. It paves the way through which 'power and signs and false wonders' can enter into the professing church. The spirit of the antichrist is very busy.

Movies, in which the so-called good or white magic is used to conquer the evil, are watched by a huge number of people. Such movies are 'sold' to Christians as inspiring, in order to do the good. What a deception that is! The opposite effect is happening. Christians are sold to the magic! And let this be clear: there is no such thing as good or white magic. Magic comes from the lie.

V10. Satan uses "all the deception of wickedness". Nothing is too foolish for him. Everything is useful, as long as it serves his intention. There is no trace of uprightness in him. He will absolutely manipulate people without conscience and drag them with him into destruction. That is his goal, because he thinks to hit God the most in such a way. But also here it appears that he doesn't know God.

His deception only eagerly finds entrance with "those who perish". Those are the people to whom the word of the cross is foolishness (1Cor 1:18). The gospel, the truth, has been offered to them, but they have rejected it as ridiculous. There is no love for the truth. They refuse to open their heart to the truth; the preaching leaves them cold. They do not want to be saved.

V11. "For this reason", or 'on this basis', God will make sure that they believe the lie. You see that they owe it to themselves. Their attitude toward the truth is what causes them to perish. God wants to save them (1Tim 2:4), but they refuse. Many times He has begged them through His servants to be reconciled to Him (2Cor 5:20), but they reject Him, again and again. They perish because they have not obeyed the gospel (2Thes 1:8) and because they have not accepted it, which the Thessalonians and you have done (1Thes 1:6; 2:13).

Therefore it is about people to whom the way of salvation has been presented, but who did not accept it. It is therefore not about people who have never heard of the gospel. That means that this judgment of hardening will come upon our Western world especially, where the word of the gospel has sounded so clear. Although they have not died yet, it will be too late for them to repent. They have let the appointed time pass by, as did Pha-

raoh (Jer 46:17). The judgment of hardening will strike the wicked (Rom 1:22-32), will strike Israel, with the exception of a remnant (Rom 11:25) and in this section it will strike professing Christianity after the rapture of the believers.

What will remain as Christianity on earth after the rapture of church is a Christ-less Christianity. Christianity will then exist of people who maintain their confession as Christians without any connection with the Christ of God. They will be an easy prey for the work of error that will then be sent by God.

It will then be made impossible for them to still repent. After the rapture of the church, there will be no more opportunity for those who have not believed the truth before that moment. For those who have ever heard the gospel and rejected it, there will be therefore no second chance! Because they refused to believe the truth, they will believe the lie.

God uses satan to execute the judgment that He has determined. God has sovereign power in His use of satan and his demons. He has used satan to test His servant Job. He has used a spirit of lies to tempt Ahab, so that he would be killed in the battle (1Kgs 22:19-23).

V12. The revenge that God brings on people is closely related to the violation that they have committed (Eze 14:9). Have these people preferred the lie of the devil above the love for the truth? Then God will make sure that they will embrace the lie of the devil to their own judgment. The lie which they will believe is the claim of the antichrist that he is God (verse 4). You see today how God is being excluded further and further from society and that man becomes the center more and more. Well, soon man's admiration for man will receive its unreturnable completion as man pays all his homage to the man of sin.

This is the result if the truth is not believed. It comes down to faith in the truth. That is not a matter of the intellect, but of the heart. Therefore you read earlier about 'love' of the truth. Love is something of the heart. Therefore the truth has got nothing to do with a theoretical, theological knowledge of the head, but a relationship with a person. That Person is the Lord Jesus.

He is the truth (Jn 14:6). Do you want to know the truth about God? Then you will learn to know it if you are occupied with Him. Do you want to know the truth about man? Then you must look at Him. What man is supposed to be before God you see in Him. What man is as a sinner, is missing completely with Him. Every deed, every word, every thought of God, becomes completely visible in Him and it is also the test for everything that you as man do, say and think.

Whoever does not believe the truth and has no inward relationship with it nor feels any love for it, will set his own standards. Those are by definition standards which allow the sinful man to live as he pleases. Such a life shows "pleasure in wickedness". Such a person deliberately and consciously chooses to fulfill the desires of his own 'I'. It does not arise in his mind what God wants and what is to the honor of the Lord Jesus. God's judgment on him will be righteous.

Now read 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 again.

Reflection: What do you do with what you have learnt about the terrible future of the unbelievers?

2Thes 2:13-17 | Chosen and Called

13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word [of mouth] or by letter from us. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17 comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.

This section starts with the word “but”. It indicates that what follows is in contrast to what has preceded it. A brief repetition of it is not a bad idea, I think. Paul has previously dealt with false teachings about the day of the Lord. Deceivers came with those false teachings. In chapter 1 he encourages the Thessalonians to look forward to the coming of the Lord and exhorts them to endure sufferings for the sake of the Name of the Lord until that time. In chapter 2 Paul goes into details on the false teaching. He shows that the day of the Lord has not come yet.

In chapter 1 he points at the characteristic of that day. He makes clear that then the situation will be the reverse of the situation that they are dealing with now. In chapter 2 he explains why that day has not come yet, which is because some other events are still to take place first – first the antichrist, then the apostasy. But also the antichrist can only come when something and somebody has been taken away, which is the church and the Holy Spirit. Then the evil can break loose, although it will not happen at once in all its intensity. The full extent of the evil will reveal itself when the devil will be thrown to the earth and he demands and exercises his demonic government. That will take place about three and a half years after the rapture of the church. Then all brakes of the evil will be loosened.

Paul also points to the people who will be left behind (verse 12). After the rapture of the believers there will certainly be a number of people that repent. That will happen through the preaching of believing Jews. Those are however not the people from verse 12, for those are people who have consciously refused to believe the gospel. A judgment of hardening will

come on them. They will believe the lie of the antichrist and perish together with him in unbelief. There will be no such thing as a second chance.

V13. If you realize that you are surrounded by such people, you may almost get discouraged. You may even think in a weak moment: 'Could this also be my fate?' Well, Paul is reassuring you. He addresses the Thessalonians, and you may also include yourself, as "brethren beloved by the Lord". One does not say that of people who do not have love for the truth. You indeed say that of those who love the truth sincerely. Whoever loves the truth, is beloved by the Lord.

Paul has pictured the dark scene of the fate which the antichrist and his supporters will be subjected to when the believers have been caught up. The persecutors and the oppressors who were still attacking and cursing the Thessalonians, will partake of that fate. It must have been beneficial to them to hear in the midst of all their sufferings, that Paul was still giving thanks to God for them. It must have also done them good to hear that they were "chosen" by God "for salvation". That brings an end to all doubt.

There is another encouragement added. God has chosen them "from the beginning" or "to be the first fruits". That indicates that they are special to God. When there is mention of a 'first fruit' it means that a lot more will follow. A 'first fruit' indicates a harvest that follows. The Thessalonians were therefore the first of a great harvest of believers that God will bring in (cf. Rom 16:5; 1Cor 16:15; Rev 14:14). The church will only be complete when all who God has chosen, will be saved. When the last soul has been added, then the church will be complete and will be caught up. The Thessalonians were the beginning of this great work of God. In them God saw as it were the whole of the redeemed ones. That must have been a great joy for Paul's heart.

But how did Paul know then that God had chosen them? He could know it by the fruits he saw in their lives. And he who has been chosen by God will be saved. Salvation stands here opposite eternal destruction (2Thes 1:9). It is the arrival at the place of destination and reaching the full rest.

God has fulfilled his choice by the work of His Spirit in your heart and conscience. The Spirit has sanctified you, set you apart from the world for God (1Pet 1:2). Here you see God's side of the work in you. There is another

er side though, your side, which is that you have believed the truth. You have acknowledged that what God says about sin and the sinner applies to you and you have accepted the gospel.

V14. That gospel has been the calling voice of God. In that way He has called you and you have believed it. You may know that you will partake of the glory of the Lord Jesus. That is awesome, isn't it? We are not there yet, we still have to wait, but this is a certainty. You will obtain the glory which belongs to the Lord Jesus. In its fullness this goes beyond the inheritance in the kingdom of peace. You may consider this the glory that the Lord Jesus has received from the Father because of His work on the cross, where He glorified the Father (Jn 17:4-5). He will share that glory with all who will be with Him in the house of the Father (Jn 17:22). That is great, isn't it?

V15. Therefore, if this has been reserved for you, you must not let yourself be confused. The enemy will do his utmost to take this perspective out of your mind. But it should actually motivate you to stand firm, which means that the thought of your calling will make you spiritually stable. That firmness does not lie in the so-called letters or revelations that people have so-called received (cf. verse 2). That firmness is in the fact that they take to heart what the apostle has taught them. He reminds them of the traditions that he has taught them.

He first has done that orally when he was with them. Later he did that by his first letter to them and also by this second letter. If they take those traditions seriously, if they acknowledge that they are given on God's behalf, because Paul has received them from God (cf. Gal 1:12), they will keep them. Then they will not become prey to the false teachers with their destructive and miserable making teachings.

By putting first in writing what he had told them orally, the traditions have gotten a permanent and therefore unchangeable character. That is important to us. We have no new traditions by word or by letter to be expected anymore. Everyone who comes with a 'new' message in order to add something to the Scripture can be unmasked as a deceiver. The Scripture is complete. You can be assured about that. Everything that God wants you to know, is fixed in the Bible which is in your hand. If you use

that to test what a person wants to make you believe, you will not run the risk to lose your steadfastness.

V16. In the concluding words of this chapter Paul adds something more. He has shown us the importance of holding fast to the traditions, which is the Scripture. Now he still emphatically refers them to two Divine Persons. He makes holding on to the Scripture a matter of the Lord Jesus and God. You may think of the love that both these Divine Persons have for you. All of Their love goes out to you. They have shown Their love for you when the Lord Jesus died for you under the judgment of God (Jn 3:16; Gal 2:20).

Due to that you have received “eternal comfort”. When you were still unconverted, the moment came that you feared the wrath of God. You were discouraged. Then you came to faith in the Lord Jesus and God’s wrath was taken away from you and you found comfort with Them (Isa 12:1). Also as a believer you experienced comfort from Them in all kinds of situations of sorrow and even despair, for God is the “God of all comfort” (2Cor 1:3-4). Therefore you will experience that comfort forever (cf. Lk 16:25; Rev 7:17).

Both these Divine Persons have also given you “good hope”. If you open yourself to false teachers you will have insecurity. You will lose the sight of what God has prepared for you. The good hope is the opposite of that. The biblical hope is a security. God is after all “the God of hope” (Rom 15:13). Nothing is insecure with Him. There is mention of hope because the fulfillment is in the future and God ensures that. If you may know that that comfort and hope are your portion, it is not something to boast about. It is your portion because of God’s “grace”. To Him be all honor for that!

V17. Paul closes with a wish. He wishes that the Lord Jesus and God the Father will do something with the hearts of the Thessalonians. Even though they know the love of these Divine Persons and that they also know to have gained eternal comfort and good hope, they still have a way to go. It is not meant that you will wait for the fulfillment of hope with your arms crossed. No, the purpose is that everything (“every”) that you do (“work”) and what you say (“word”) is “good”, is useful, is a help or benefit for others.

Because from your heart all your activities flow (Pro 4:23), Paul looks up to God and the Lord Jesus, that They may “comfort” and “strengthen” you with a view to that. In the next chapter you will receive practical teaching on that.

Now read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 again.

Reflection: What do you learn from these verses about election and calling?

2 Thessalonians 3

2Thes 3:1-5 | Pray for Us

1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as [it did] also with you; 2 and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil [one]. 4 We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will [continue to] do what we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.

V1. Paul has highlighted his main subject. Now he wants to address some other things. These are actually additional remarks. You can derive that from the introductory word “finally”. That does not mean that these things are less important, as if you could read them if you have some time left or if you feel in the mood to do it. No, what he wants to add is a result of the ‘brotherly relationship’ he has with them.

The first thing he mentions is prayer. He is asking for intercession. In that way he calls upon their bond with him. But it is not so much that he asks for intercession concerning himself, but for the sake of the rapidly spreading and glorifying of “the word of the Lord”. That’s what his life was all about. The Word transforms lives. Whenever there is something which is pleasing to God, it is owed to the work of His Word. The world as a whole “lies in [the power of] the evil one” (1Jn 5:19). Wherever the Word does its work and is being accepted, the connection with the world is abandoned and something begins which is related to God.

A victory was won there over the power of the world, sin and satan. The power of the Word is seen there. Whenever the power of the Word becomes visible in a human’s life, it is a glorification of the Word, a tribute to the Word (Acts 13:48). You may consider the word “glorified” here in the sense of ‘crowned’. The Word has completed its full course when it is accepted in faith and has its full effect in the recipient.

The thought that is embedded in the word “spread rapidly”, regards an athlete who runs over the racetrack and tries to be the first to cross the finish line (Psa 147:15). This way of spreading rapidly can be applied to areas where the gospel is being preached and also to the hearts where the Word has entered into. The Word is not static but dynamic.

The Thessalonians are a proof of that. In order to spread ‘the Word of the Lord’ rapidly, Paul could refer to themselves. As the Word is spreading rapidly among them and with them, they are to pray that it would happen everywhere. Their lives are so to say a promotion for the rapid spreading of the Word. Is your life also a promotion for this purpose? The message of the gospel is as attractive as your life is reflecting.

V2. After his request for intercession for the Word, he continues with requesting intercession for himself. He would like to be freed from people who are hindering the spreading of the Word (Rom 15:31; 2Tim 4:18). Those people behave themselves indecently, inappropriately toward the gospel. Don’t be surprised about that. That is the kind of response the gospel evokes. People who do not want to bow themselves to it feel threatened in their position. Therefore they attack it by unreasonable means.

If they would think soberly, they would see that the gospel causes only profit. But they are not able to because they are inwardly wrong. They have a perverse and evil mind. They do not want to surrender to God and the Lord Jesus.

If you are engaged with a service for the Lord you will meet adversaries on your way. Here you see that you can pray that those adversaries will not be able to go on with their work. These people are adversaries of the gospel because they are not faithful to the Word of God. They do not believe in it, they do not acknowledge its authority. They only accept those parts they agree with. In that way they make themselves judges of the Word, but they do not allow themselves to be judged by it.

V3. While unfaithfulness is the characteristic of those who do not take God’s Word seriously, the feature of the Lord is that He is always faithful. You can always trust Him, count on Him. He will not deny Himself (2Tim 2:13). At the end of the first letter is written that God is faithful (1Thes 5:24); here you read that the Lord is faithful. It doesn’t matter of course. Both

Divine Persons are faithful. In the midst of all unfaithfulness the Lord is a mighty fortress. He is faithful as He was when He called us (1Cor 1:9). Because He is faithful He will protect us (1Thes 5:23-24) and will fulfill His promises (Heb 10:23). He is called "Faithful" (Rev 19:11).

Paul refers to the faithfulness of the Lord to then point you to what He does. He strengthens and protects against the evil one. He grants power so that one is able to deal with the pressure. He will also stand beside you as a Guard to keep the evil away from you so that it will not harm you (2Tim 4:18; Mt 6:13). He cares about you and takes care of you. From Him comes strength and protection. His capability is just as great as His care. In His hands you are safe and no enemy can come near you.

V4. Security doesn't make one careless. Safety doesn't make one inactive. On the one hand you may know that the Lord strengthens and protects you. On the other hand it is asked here of you to keep the commandments of Paul, which means that you obey God's Word. Paul trusts that the Thessalonians will obey his commandments. The reason of his confidence was due to the fact that they were living in fellowship with the Lord. If you have a relationship with the Lord, then others may trust that you will obey what He says in His Word.

V5. There is not a more wonderful motive to obey than to look at "the love of God". There is not a more wonderful motive to endure suffering than to look at "the steadfastness of Christ". Paul desires that the Lord will focus their heart on that. The word 'direct' implies that the way is kept free from hindrances, so that the heart may concentrate unhinderedly. We again and again need to become more and more aware of 'the love of God'. God's love for us is unchangeable, but our consciousness of that is quite subject to fluctuations.

In his letter Jude appeals to the believers to keep themselves in the love of God (Jude 1:21). That is the same thought here. You may know that the love of God has been poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5), but only if you are engaged with it, if it means to you that God loves you, your heart is focused on it. Circumstances or wrong deeds may easily slide in between God's love for you and your awareness of it. Because of

what is it that you sometimes find it difficult to obey God's Word? Is it not often because you do not think about God's love for you in that case?

If you live with the awareness in your heart of God's love for you, then you will live a happy life. Then you will be in God's presence. You experience the same as the Lord Jesus always experienced. Has there ever been a moment that His heart was not focused on the love of God? He was always aware of that. Due to that He went His way in perfect peace, even though it was so difficult. If you are continually conscious of the love of God, you will be lifted above the circumstances.

In situations of suffering and lack of recognition because you are related to the Lord Jesus, it is an encouragement if your heart is focused on 'the steadfastness of Christ'. Look up to Him, just as He went His way on earth, and look up to Him as He is now in heaven. On earth you see Him with His eye fixed on the joy set before Him. Therefore He endured the cross and despised the shame (Heb 12:2-3). He steadfastly went on, without letting Himself be drawn away from the way of obedience and suffering. Follow His example, His life on earth.

Also in heaven He is your example of steadfastness. Don't you think that He would love to make an end to all suffering of His own? And how much did the Father promise Him as a reward for His work? He waits for the moment that the Father will make His enemies a footstool for His feet (Heb 10:13). If your heart gets focused on His steadfastness, you will also be able to be steadfast.

'The love of God' and 'the steadfastness of Christ' are completely strange to the world in which you live. The love of God is being rejected. Questions that start with 'if God is love', are often the beginning of a debate on God's love. They are more a call to God to account. Also steadfastness and patience in tests and sufferings are not accepted. There should be an outcome immediately. The man of the world wants to have satisfaction of his needs immediately.

If your heart is focused on the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ, it will, besides the fact that it makes you happy yourself, be a testimony to your environment. Not that it will deliver you applause, but then the Lord Jesus will become visible in your life. That means a blessing for your

environment, as the life of the Lord Jesus was a blessing to everyone with whom He came into contact.

Now read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 again.

Reflection: How could you apply Paul's request for intercession in your life?

2Thes 3:6-10 | An Unruly Life

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we [kept] working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the right [to this], but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. 10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.

V6. One more thing Paul needs to get off his chest.. The issue that he now raises is not that flattering for the Thessalonians. But it is necessary that he speaks to them on this issue. What is the matter? Among them there were believers who were leading an unruly life. They ignored the tradition they received from the apostle concerning the normal life of a Christian. What could be the cause of that?

It may have something to do with his teaching on the coming of the Lord Jesus, to which they have listened carefully. It could be that they had drawn the wrong conclusion from that. They may have thought: 'The Lord is coming soon, isn't it? Well, then it is no use to rush for your daily bread.' Therefore they stopped working and were sitting with their arms crossed staring at heaven. Anyway, with their attitude of unemployment they could not count on Paul's approval.

They may have thought that they were spiritual, for the earthly things did not matter much to them anymore. They after all had to leave behind everything if the Lord would come. Heaven was the only thing that counted. That looked very godly, but it is completely wrong. Paul calls their way of life "unruly". He commands the Thessalonians to correct their conduct. And they absolutely should not think that this command is not that serious. He relates to it the full authority of the Name of the Lord Jesus.

It may have scared them a little bit when they heard this. Isn't it loveless to withdraw yourself from a brother, not to be involved with him anymore?

Did not Paul also talk about the love of God? And not to mention the way he does that. One would rather feel to be pressured by that!

That often is the (human) response whenever discipline is needed. That's what it is all about here. How could you show someone any kindness if you in that way support his laziness? True love toward those who are erring, is not supporting their error, but rather remain faithful to the Lord Jesus.

There must be mention of discipline if there is evil in the church. Discipline always has the goal to get rid from the wrong so that the church becomes clean again and in that way the Lord will feel at home again. The evil that had entered Thessalonica was caused by some brothers who were a disgrace for the Christian testimony. Their walk was not like that of most believers in Thessalonica who on the contrary had a good testimony.

The 'unruly ones' were consciously disobedient to an apostolic commandment. 'Unruly' is the marching out of step of a soldier in the midst of soldiers that are marching in line. Such a soldier does not adhere to the prescribed order of battle arrangement. He behaves himself anti-socially toward his fellow soldiers and he is disobedient to his commander. Whoever walks unruly in the church, does the same toward his fellow believer and the Lord.

Such a person must be persuaded to comply with the rules again that apply to Christians. For, although the Christian is not under the law but under grace, it does not mean that he can do as he wants. He who loves the Lord will keep the commandments of the Lord (Jn 14:21). If you love the Lord, you will submit yourself to everything He says. A Christian has obligations and a sense of responsibility. He with whom that is lacking, has to learn that.

The method that Paul prescribes here is that the church keeps away or withdraws from such a person. By keeping away from him the church makes clear to him that his behavior is inappropriate. In his first letter Paul already has given a general admonition with a view to the unruly ones (1Thes 5:14). Apparently they did not heed it and Paul therefore has to be more specific about that here and instruct them how to deal with unruly ones.

To keep away is to avoid, which causes such a person to end up in an isolated position. Misplaced hospitality would cause him to continue his undisciplined life of not working. By the way, such a person is allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. He is not a wicked man one who has to be removed from among them.

V7. The deviation of the unruly ones becomes clear if you compare their behavior to Paul's. He did not behave unruly. They themselves have observed that when he was with them. He showed them how he was supposed to be followed. His example does not imply a request but a command. They had the ability to act exactly in the same way as he had shown. They could as it were copy his behavior. The Thessalonians did not need any catalogue with prescriptions; they had an example before their eyes that lived like that. Paul does not say 'do as I say', which he could as an apostle, but 'do as I did.'

In paganism there is the thought that saints do not work. It is also a pagan thought that believers who have quitted their job in the society to be involved with spiritual matters, are a higher kind of Christians. It is for purely practical reasons because there is so much to do on the spiritual field. One is allowed to do that only if the Lord makes that clear. Such Christians therefore do not stop working, but commit themselves with double diligence to the task that the Lord has ordered them to. He will therefore reward them.

V8. The normal situation for the Christian is that he has a job in society to provide for himself by his own efforts. Paul is the great example of hard working, whereby he is often engaged with normal handiwork in order to provide for himself and his companions (Acts 18:3; 20:34). He wanted to prevent that there would be any suspicion that he was seeking financial profit (Act 20:34; 1Cor 9:12-19; 4:12). He was not seeking their goods, but he seeks good for them. Paul by the way, also knows how to value what the believers are sending him for his livelihood (Phil 4:14-20).

V9. He knows that each servant that has been sent by the Lord, is entitled to support (1Cor 9:14). The Lord Himself has said that the laborer is worthy of his wages (Lk 10:7). But one is not supposed to make use of each right. It is an exercise in the presence of the Lord whether you accept or do not

accept something. The servant will, regarding himself, have to examine whether he is not being led by greed. Regarding the giver, the servant will have to examine whether this person gives according to the instruction of the Lord and not for exerting power on him. He is not to be manipulated by money.

Paul's motive is clear. He himself wanted to serve as an example, without this clarity of his example to become cloudy because of money. You see how much Paul makes his own interests subject to the well-being of the believers. He presents himself as an example because he knew that they would in reality follow the Lord Jesus when they follow him (1Cor 11:1). And it was all about His honor.

V10. Besides pointing them to the example that he had given when he was with them, he also reminds them of a command that he had given them when he was with them. He quotes for the forgetful ones: "If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either." So it refers to somebody who is not willing to work. Everyone who is involuntarily unemployed must go on making effort to find a job. The stimulus to do that may quite disappear after many disappointing attempts. What also may happen is, that a job is being offered to which a reduction in income is related. Then the danger is great that this job is being refused.

If it is clear that a person is not willing to work, then such a person must not be helped with food. Such persons very easily make use of the kindness of others. They often go that far that they claim that others are obliged to provide them with food. He who morally has deviated in such a way, has really lost his way. He doesn't want to take his own responsibilities, while he exaggerates the extent of other people's responsibilities for his own benefit.

The quote is clear: if you are not willing to work, then you will not eat either. That is not a command to the undisciplined ones. Those ones will absolutely not care about that and will eat everything they are being offered. It is a command to the believers, not to let their charitable heart speak when such a person comes to them and wants to eat with them. When they refuse him, he will get hungry and get started to work to satisfy his hunger (Pro 16:26).

Now read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 again.

Reflection: How do you think that the people in your environment know you: as a diligent person or as one who cuts the corners?

2Thes 3:11-18 | An Undisciplined Life and Greetings

11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. 14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. 15 [Yet] do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. 16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all! 17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

V11. The reason why Paul goes into this question of ‘working for a living’ in such detail, is because he has heard something. He again received from a reliable source that there were believers at Thessalonica, who were not willing to work. As you have already seen, such believers are not a promotion for the Christian faith. Those ones who are guilty of that, must realize that. But not working was not the only point. People who do not work, have a lot of time to do other things. He who is not occupied according to the will of the Lord, will surely be occupied in a wrong way.

Such believers are a plague for the church. They themselves do not do anything and if they do something, it is keeping others from their work. They meddle in matters that are none of their business. Meddlesomeness is a wrong thing against which the Scripture also in other places warns (1Tim 5:13; 1Pet 4:15). If you get a visit from busybodies, you may not easily get rid of them. They rob you from your time and energy and they also expect you to invite them for dinner. When they have finally left then you have to work twice as hard to catch up the delay you have suffered.

V12. Then Paul addresses the unruly persons. He has a command and exhortation for them “in the Lord Jesus Christ”. By commanding and exhorting them in this way he does not put himself above them, but beside them. He acknowledged them as brethren ‘in the Lord Jesus Christ’. That is his starting point for his command and exhortation. In that way his order to

them does not sound demanding, but loving and at the same time full of power.

He orders them to eat their own bread, which means to take care of their own livelihood, instead of eating someone else's bread. That is the reverse of verse 10. He adds to it that they should "work in quiet fashion". A Christian is not restless, hectically seeking for more and more. The reputation of a workaholic (someone who is addicted to work) is therefore not a promotion. The life of a Christian radiates rest, while there is still a lot of activity. He has a disciplined life full of meaning which is in huge contrast to the aimlessness of unruly persons.

V13. Paul again addresses the whole church, but especially those who lead an orderly life. There is the danger to stop with doing good. One may have invested, had thought to help someone else. Sometime later he notices that the slacker has misused his kindness. I have experienced that also. One would say to himself: 'That will in no way happen to me again.' Paul's response to that is: Do not grow weary of doing good. Just continue with doing good, but then to those who really need it.' It is very likely that one makes that mistake again, but still this word remains: continue to do good.

V14. In case someone still does not care about what Paul says, then 'special note is to be taken of' such a person. This measure implies that it must be openly announced in the church that such a person is refusing persistently to comply with the rules of the normal Christian life. Besides, the measure does not only apply in case a person does not want to work, but applies to all cases that consistently affects the Christian life and in that way the testimony of the church. The measure means that all social contacts with the person concerned should be broken.

'To take special note of' means to give a personal mark, which makes identification possible. It is like putting a stamp on someone. Such a person is no longer allowed to feel the blessed fellowship of his brothers and sisters. By isolating him he ought to feel the wrong of his behavior. He does not belong to the world and the believers do not associate with him. The purpose of this measure of discipline is that he "will be put to shame", so that a change of the state of mind may take place.

V15. The normal brotherly association is not possible anymore and will strongly be cooled down. However, he is not to be regarded as an enemy (cf. Mt 18:17). He is not a 'wicked man'. The discipline that should be exerted on a wicked man goes much further. When there is mention of a wicked man, it is about someone of whom you should ask yourself whether he is indeed a brother. Such is not the case here, for he is to be admonished "as a brother". In case of a wicked man there is nothing left to be admonished about. All attempts to win him, have failed. There is nothing left than to remove him (1Cor 5:13b).

You may compare the difference between these disciplinary measures of the church with what can happen in a family with a child that is disobedient. The most serious disciplinary measure is that a child is refused to have access to the house. The parents surely have taken a lot of other measures before they proceed to do that.

If a child is disobedient, the parents will first talk with him. When the child appears to persist and continually causes disagreement or refuses to adjust himself, then he may be set apart, for example. That measure is only effective if the rest of the family members have the same attitude as the parents. The family will also pray continually, that the Lord may let the child feel the missing of the family contact and in that way may come to repentance.

A person who has to be taken special note of is still allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. He belongs to the church and is allowed to express that by the breaking of the bread. But for everything else he is isolated. And in case there is a contact, the believers will take that occasion to admonish him. It is important that we realize every time we exercise discipline, that we ourselves also often fail. Admonition should in no way be applied arrogantly.

V16. After the admonition Paul focuses his eyes on "the Lord of peace" (Rom 15:33; Phil 4:9). That is urgent because the exertion of discipline may easily arouse feelings of discontent. It can be discontent about the disciplinary measure or discontent about the way it is being dealt with. Paul wishes them that they may experience the peace of the Lord, of Him personally. That makes his wish, which is actually a prayer, more than a feeling. It becomes an experience of fellowship with the Lord. If it would

depend on us, how much discontent would there be? Therefore it is so important to look upon Him Who rules and Who can work peace. He is the great Prince of peace.

He can ensure that peace is maintained when sin asserts itself in the church. He will then make sure that it is being dealt with in the right way. That only happens if everyone is focused on Him for everything that happens in the church. But He is also the Lord of peace in every other area of life that lies outside the church. He is able to give peace “continually” and “in every circumstance”. ‘Continually’ means uninterrupted, always. ‘In every circumstance’ excludes that there may be panic in whatever way. His peace is uninterrupted with a view to time and indissoluble with a view to circumstances.

Whatever the situation in which you may find yourself, the Lord is able to give you peace. It is the calmness of the heart that trusts in God and in that way is lifted above the circumstances. The word for ‘peace’ is the wish that the whole man, which is the spirit, soul and body, will prosper. It is not a wish or prayer for liberation from the test, but for peace in the test.

He wishes them all the presence of the Lord. That also includes the brother who is living unruly. The moment that Paul is writing this, he himself has just experienced the presence of the Lord when he also faced difficulties (Acts 18:10). The Lord Himself is saying that to you too very personally: “And lo, I am with you always” (Mt 28:20).

V17. Because the Thessalonians were upset about a letter that was allegedly written by Paul, he emphasizes that this letter really comes from him. They should in no way have any doubt about that. Most times Paul dictated his letters (Rom 16:22). In cases he himself wrote a letter, he mentions it (Gal 6:11; Phlm 1:19), which indicates that this concerned an exception. Among the dictated letters he put his ‘signature’ by writing some concluding lines with his own hand. That excluded every doubt with the recipients (cf. 1Cor 16:21; Col 4:18). They can derive from his handwriting that the letter is his.

V18. He concludes with wishing them all “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”. This is again a wish which he speaks out to “all”. This fare-well greeting is therefore also applied to the unruly persons. He doesn’t want

to exclude anyone from the grace of God. All are in need of that grace. You are too. It is wonderful to pray that for one another.

Now read 2 Thessalonians 3:12-18 again.

Reflection: What shows the care of Paul for the faithful believers and what shows his care for the unruly ones?

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