New Testament Letter: 2 Thessalonians Intro – 1:4

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Date: AD 52 (1 Thessalonians AD 51)

Purpose: To correct misunderstandings about Christ's return that had arisen after Paul and his co-workers left Thessalonica.

Reading 2 Thessalonians: Magic rites and mock miracles, which deceived many, were part of daily life for ancient Greeks and Romans (cf Ac 19:18–19). In 2 Thessalonians, Paul warns of a far more powerful deception that will come before the end of time. The "lawless one" will use false signs and miracles to delude people into following him. Though Paul warns the Thessalonians about this coming deception, he also focuses them on living each day by the Gospel...

Luther on 2 Thessalonians: …because of misunderstanding—the Thessalonians understood that the Last Day was already at hand. Thereupon Paul writes this epistle and explains himself.

In chapter 1 he comforts them **with** the eternal reward *of their faith* and *of their patience amid sufferings of every kind* and **with** the punishment of their persecutors in eternal pain.

In chapter 2 he teaches that before the Last Day, the Roman Empire must first pass away, and Antichrist set himself up as God in Christendom and seduce the unbelieving world with false doctrines and signs—until Christ shall come and destroy him by his glorious coming, first slaying him with spiritual preaching.

In chapter 3 he gives some admonitions… (AE 35:387–88).

Challenge for Readers: *Man of Lawlessness*. Paul makes special reference to apostasy and the exaltation of the "lawless one" (2:3–10), which must take place before Christ's return in judgment. Though his descriptions of these events are unique, the same themes are taught in other parts of Scripture. According to the Early Church father Irenaeus (*ANF* 1:535–56), the lawless one corresponds to the "spirit of the antichrist" (1Jn 2:18; 4:3) and the beast (and/or the prostitute "Babylon"; Rv 13:1–10; chs 17–18).

Blessings for Readers: As in 1 Thessalonians, Paul exhibits exemplary pastoral care for the Thessalonian congregation. He patiently explains issues of doctrine that have confused them and instructs them consistently in matters of faith and life, according to the traditions that he had taught them (2:15). Though the end times appear fascinating, Paul demonstrates once again that applying Law and Gospel for daily living has the greatest importance. Through Law and Gospel, the Lord prepares us for the persecution at the end and Jesus' blessed return.

Outline:

I. The Greeting (1:1–2)
II. The Thanksgiving (1:3–12)
   A. Thanks for Faith and Love (1:3–4)
   B. Encouragement of the Discouraged (1:5–10)
   C. Petition for Worthy Conduct (1:11–12)
III. Exhortation and Encouragement about the End Times (ch 2)
   A. Events Preceding the Coming of the Day of the Lord (2:1–12)
   B. Encouragement and Thanksgiving (2:13–17)
IV. Apostolic Commands (3:1–15)
   A. Request for Prayers (3:1–5)
   B. Discipline of the Disorderly (3:6–12)
   C. Admonition to Do Good (3:13–15)
V. Conclusion (3:16–18)
   A. Prayer for Peace (3:16)
   B. Greeting (3:17)
   C. Benediction (3:18)

ESV Bible 2 Thessalonians Introduction: This letter from the apostle Paul was probably written shortly after his first letter... He had been boasting of them to other churches, telling of their faith and their love for each other in the face of persecution. Paul reminded them that God will repay their persecutors. He also addressed two recurring problems in this church. First, they were concerned that the Lord had already returned…. Second, he admonished them not to be idle, commanding them that, "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (3:10).

Greeting: 1:1-2

1. **Chapter 1:** Paul, Silvanus *[Silas]*, and Timothy, To the church *[the believers]* of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: [2] Grace *[favor, undeserved love]* to you and peace *[regarding your relationship with God]* from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. // Christian believers are called out of worldliness to lives of holiness…. As such, we must act differently than the world…

Thanksgiving: 1:3-4

2. [3] We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. // *Faith* is our *inward relationship with God*, while *love* is our *outward expression of our faith!* In both ways *the Thessalonians were growing!* How can we grow in such ways?
   a. Faith: _____
   b. Love: _____
3. [4] Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith *in all your persecutions* and *in the afflictions that you are enduring*.
   a. Suffering mysteriously unifies us with Jesus, the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53);
      [3] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. [4] Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. [5] But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. [6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-- every one-- to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. [7] He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.
   b. it provides an opportunity for us to give glory to God (John 9:1–3); [1] As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. [2] And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" [3] Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."
   c. it tests and strengthens our faith (cf 1Pt 1:3–9); [6] In this [salvation] you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] so that the tested genuineness of your faith-- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire-- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
   d. it teaches us to love God for His own sake, and not for the sake of prosperity;
   e. it conforms and shapes us into the image of Christ (Romans 8:17); and if children, then heirs-- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
   f. it teaches us to glory in the cross (cf Lk 9:22–24; Ps 34:19–22);
   g. it humbles us, reminding us that the servant is not greater than the master and preventing self-righteousness from closing us to His gifts (John 15:20). … "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

New Testament Historical Book: 2 Thessalonians 1:5 – 2:4

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The Judgment at Christ's Coming: 1:5-12

4. [5] This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— [6] since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, [7] and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels [8] in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
   a. Now, *in this life*, believers seem like losers while unbelievers seem like winners.
   b. However, *when Jesus returns in all His power and glory*, He will take vengeance:
      i. *On those who do not know God*… who rejected Jesus as their Savior in favor of trusting in their own decency, good works, etc. (Matt. 7:21-23).
      ii. *On those who do not obey the gospel*: Rejection of the Gospel is disobedience to the divine invitation to faith and life (John 3:18).
5. [9] They *(who do not know God nor obey the gospel)* will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, [10] when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.
   a. Everlasting fire, chastisement, ruin, punishment, and judgment describe the end of those who reject God's mercy.
   b. *testimony*. The Gospel (v 8) preached by the apostles, who were witnesses of what they had seen and heard, especially the utterly convincing fact that Jesus was raised from the dead (1Co 15:5–8).
6. [11] To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, [12] so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
   a. *worthy of His calling*. Only God can… make the Thessalonians or anyone worthy…! Here the worthiness refers to our present vocations and our holiness therein. God calls Christians in Baptism, and thus He saves them, draws them to Himself, and keeps them in His hand.
   b. *every resolve for good and every work of faith*. [Shaped] by God's sanctifying power; God's gift of justifying faith produces these good works. Though justification and sanctification are distinct, as are faith and works, they are never separate. We are saved through faith alone, but faith is never alone; it always produces good works.
   c. *by His power*. …we are powerless to do the good works of faith. Paul's prayer is that God would continue His work and bring it to completion (cf Jn 15:5).

The Man of Lawlessness: 2:1-12

1. **Chapter 2:** Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, [2] not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.
   a. *by a spirit or a spoken word*. Paul strongly warns the Thessalonians to beware of false prophets (false spirits), and also misunderstandings of inspired prophetic teachings.

b. *the day of the Lord has come*. A deception. Paul explains the deception in v 3.

2. [3] Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, [4] who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. // Before the coming of the Lord, *thus before Jesus' return*, the rebellion must come and the man of lawlessness must be revealed. What do such things mean?

   a. *rebellion*. *[literally, apostacy]* Abandonment of the faith. Betrayal, falsehood, hatred, and lawlessness by misled Christians will be marks of this intrachurch rebellion against God and His truth. Jesus said, "…many will fall away... And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:10-14 ESV).

   b. *man of lawlessness*. He comes as the completion of the rebellion. Elsewhere in Scripture, this incarnation of evil is called "the antichrist" and "the beast." Luther: "[He] not only is a sinner in his own right, but… through false doctrine [he] causes others to sin with him" (AE 41:288).

   c. *son of destruction*. …He embodies the great rebellion against God…. He has not yet come, but the powers that he embodies are already active (v 7). Judas is a type of the man of lawlessness: Jesus prayed, "…not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction" (Jn. 17:12 ESV).

   d. *exalts himself*. The man of lawlessness exalts himself over both true religion (Christianity) and false religion (man-made).

   e. *temple of God*. Paul could be using the Jerusalem temple as a symbol of God's authority or rule…. Church Fathers believed the Antichrist would be a successor to the Roman Empire. During the medieval period, some Franciscans and other theologians asserted strongly that the pope was the Antichrist. Others saw the coming of the Antichrist in the attacks of the Muslim Turks. The Lutheran Confessions describe papal and Islamic doctrines as "marks of Antichrist" and express that the Antichrist will manifest himself as an authority over the Church at the end of time. "The marks of Antichrist plainly agree with the kingdom of the pope and his followers…." (Tr 39).

   f. *proclaiming himself to be God*. According to catholic.com: "Papal Infallibility belongs in a special way to the pope as head of the bishops (Matt. 16:17–19). As Vatican II remarked, it is a charism *[divinely conferred power]* the pope "enjoys in virtue of his office, when… he proclaims by a definitive act some doctrine of faith or morals. Therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly held irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, an assistance promised to him in blessed Peter."[1] *Regarding Peter, see below!*

   g. ESV **Matthew 16:16-19** Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. [18] And I tell you, you are Peter *[Πέτρος, meaning stone]*, and on this rock *[πέτρᾳ, meaning a rock formation as distinct from a single stone]* I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

[1] https://www.catholic.com/tract/papal-infallibility

New Testament Historical Book: 2 Thessalonians 2:5-15

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The Man of Lawlessness: 2:1-12 – *Continued*

3. [5] Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? [6] And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. // We don't know exactly what is restraining him, *but God is ultimately in control!* (See Lam. 3:37-38).
4. [7] For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. [8] And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.
   a. Consider the following[2]:
      i. Worldwide Number of Christians: In 2015… 2.3 billion.
      ii. Top 3 Largest National Christian Populations: About half of all Christians live in just 10 countries. The top three:
         1. United States - 246,780,000 (79.5% of the Population)
         2. Brazil - 175,770,000 (90.2% of the Population)
         3. Mexico - 107,780,000 (95% of the Population)
      iii. Number of Christian Denominations… 41,000…
      iv. Major Christian Traditions:
         1. Roman Catholic – …more than a billion followers constituting about half of the world's Christian population.
         2. Protestant – …approximately 800 million Protestants in the world, comprising 37% of the global Christian population.
         3. Orthodox – Approximately 260 million people worldwide are Orthodox Christians, comprising 12% of the global Christian population.
      v. Christianity in America Today: …about 78% of adults (247 million) identify themselves as Christian.
      vi. Christianity in Europe: In 2010, more than 550 million Christians were living in Europe, representing about one fourth (26%) of the global Christian population.
   b. Is there is a mystery of lawlessness at work in the world today? Y N
      i. Many in the world *who claim to be Christians* hold to non-Christian beliefs – *especially in regard to the way of salvation*, a significant sign of the mystery of lawlessness being at work.
      ii. As the lawless one is revealed – *even now*, the Word of God continues to fight against him and will eventually kill him. Then, even though many will believe the lawless one is something, *Jesus' return will show that he is nothing!*
5. [9] The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, [10] and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. [11] Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, [12] in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
   a. *activity of Satan*. The lawless one is an agent of Satan...
   b. *false signs and wonders*. [An imitation] by the Antichrist of the true Christ, who did

[2] https://www.thoughtco.com/christianity-statistics-700533

true "mighty works and wonders and signs" (Ac 2:22).

c. Jesus prophesied about this work of the devil ["For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect" (Mk. 13:22 ESV)]. These evil and misleading miracles are intended to draw people into falsehood.

d. *refused to love the truth*. Why is that a huge problem? See John 8:31-32: _____ _____

e. Regarding verse 11: God gives the perishing (the wicked, those persistent in unbelief) over to the evil they themselves have chosen.

f. *in order that all may be condemned*. God predestines/elects no one to condemnation; [that] would be counter to His very character and being as the God of grace and mercy in Christ Jesus (Ezekiel 33:11; 1 Timothy 2:3–4; 2 Peter 3:9). Luther states that the reason God created us was to redeem us! Condemnation is truly self-chosen by willful rejection of God's love in Christ.

Summary of 2:1-12: Our only protection against falsehood is to cling to the Word of God: read the Bible, pray based on the Word, and continue to hear the Word in the communion of saints. The Lord, the Word made flesh, brings us life under this Word of truth.

Stand Firm: 2:13-17

6. [13] But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

a. *God chose you*. God has elected His people unto salvation; thus our salvation is sure.

i. ESV **2 Timothy 1:8-10** …do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, [9] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, [10] and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel… (Other key passages on election: Rm 8:29–39; Ep 1:3–14).

ii. "This teaching is useful and comforting for all those who are concerned about the revealed will of God and follow the order which St. Paul observed in the Epistle to the Romans. There he first of all points people to repentance, acknowledgment of their sins, and then to faith in Christ and obedience to God before he speaks of the mystery of God's eternal election."[3]

b. *through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth*. It is the H____ S_____ who makes us holy in God's sight; He does His work by giving us f_____ to believe God's Word of T_____ about our s____ and His work to save us through J_____!

7. [14] To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ *[which He will share with His followers when He returns]*. [15] So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

a. *traditions*. The doctrine that the apostles received from their divine Master. There was already at this time, before any written Gospel had appeared, an established Christian teaching that one was not allowed to alter.

b. ESV **Acts 2:42** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

[3] Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (p. 518). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

New Testament Historical Book: 2 Thessalonians 2:16 – 3:18

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Stand Firm: 2:13-17 – *Continued*

8. [16] Now may our **Lord Jesus Christ** himself, and **God our Father**, who loved us and gave us eternal **comfort** and good hope through grace, [17] comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.
   a. *comfort*. …an allusion to one of the Holy Spirit's names: the Comforter (KJV) or Helper (Jn 14:26); the blessing is trinitarian.
   b. *hope through grace*. Because of God's good favor toward us, His loving and kind disposition *[and not because of our kindness or good works]*, we have sure *[and certain]* hope for the day of redemption.
9. A summary of 2:13-17: Paul calls on the Thessalonians to stand firm in the faith the Lord has given them. He reminds them that both their calling and comfort have God as the source…. The God who has elected us unto salvation keeps us steadfast in the faith (cf 1Th 5:23–24). The doctrine of election is a doctrine of the Gospel, by which we know that our salvation is guaranteed (Eph 1:14) because it depends on God alone as He has chosen us before the foundation of the world. God assures us of this through the external signs of His Word and Sacrament He handed down to us through the apostles.

Pray for Us: 3:1-5

1. **Chapter 3** Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead *[run, spread rapidly]* and be honored, as happened among you, [2] and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. [3] But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. [4] And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. [5] May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.
   a. Vv. 1-2: Prayer is requested – *because it is needed and powerful* – for spreading God's Word, for people honoring God's Word by learning it, living it, and sharing it, and for God to grant protection from those without faith who want to extinguish His Word.
   b. V. 3: Even though we are disappointed by people who are unfaithful, *let us keep remembering that God is faithful!*
   c. V. 4: Paul *gave a compliment* – "are doing", and *set an expectation* – "will do". *So the Thessalonians had something to live up to!*
   d. V. 5: *hearts*. The total inner person; indicates our communion with God through faith. When something is merely on the outside, *we call such a person a hypocrite*. When both inside and outside, *we know such a person is genuine*.

Warning Against Idleness: 3:6-15

2. [6] Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. [7] For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, [8] nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. [9] It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. [10] For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. [11] For we hear that

some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. [12] Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

a. V. 6: Regarding the idle ones, Paul does call them "brothers"; however, he also instructed believers to "keep away" – since those who do not keep away may fall into the very same pattern of idleness.

b. V 7: As Paul made tents so he could buy what he needed, so he encouraged the Thessalonians to use their abilities to provide for their own needs.

c. V. 9: Paul was a minister of the gospel; in 1 Corinthians 9:14 he wrote that "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." Paul had every right to such; however, he chose to support himself and set a strong example for the others.

d. V. 10: For all who can work doing something to earn their way, they should; however, for those who are truly unable, we should support them through our taxes, direct contributions, etc.

e. Vv. 11-12: A call for the idle ones and busybodies to repent.

3. [13] As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. [14] If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. [15] Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

a. V 13: Some encouragement from Paul's letter to the Galatians: [NAS] **Galatians 6:9-10** "And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

b. V. 14: When we associate with people who go against God's Word, we seem to give approval of such behavior. Also, consider this: [NAS] **Proverbs 13:20** "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm."

c. V. 15: It is at times necessary, and indeed truly loving, for one believer to speak the word of the Law to another in order to shame that person into seeing the harmful evil of his or her ways and repenting.

Benediction: 3:16-18

4. [16] Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

a. Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), who re-established peace between God and people through His sinless living and sacrificial dying to remove all sins.

b. The blessing is asking Jesus to give peace, thus assurance of ➧forgiveness, ➧right relationship with God, and ➧acceptance into heaven *at every moment* and *in every circumstance* of this life.

c. Furthermore, the Lord is not far away, *but with those who trust in Him*; just as He promised: "…and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20 NAS).

5. [17] I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. [18] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

a. *own hand*. Paul has, in his usual manner, been dictating while someone else wrote. Now he writes the conclusion, a common practice in ancient letter writing…. His greeting is a guarantee that the Letter really comes from him.

b. V. 18: Another blessing, asking for the Lord Jesus, *who is the Christ*, to continue to ➧show undeserved love and ➧be with the believers in Thessalonica!

That concludes 2 Thessalonians!