

1. Glorifying Christ Despite Difficulties: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Background to 2 Thessalonians:

- Thessalonica was a large city, capital of a Roman district of Macedonia (a main Roman province).
- Paul brought the Gospel to Thessalonica during his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9). He could not spend much time with them (perhaps three weeks only), due to the severe persecution.
- The letter of 2 Thessalonians was written by Paul (2 Thess 1:1, 3:17), and according to scholars, it was probably written from Corinth, approximately six months after writing 1 Thessalonians.
- It was written after Silas and Timothy had returned from delivering the first letter, and after they had reported to Paul how the church was going (the date would be approximately 51AD).
- 2 Thessalonians encourages believers as they undergo persecution, to correct misunderstandings about the Lord's return, and to urge them to stand firm in the faith and to not be idle.
- Of all Paul's letters, 2 Thessalonians has much teaching on Christ's return (40% of the content of the book). He urges them to live in the light of Christ's glorious return.

Bible Text: Read 2 Thess 1:1-12

Considering the Text:

What is Paul thankful for as he writes this second letter of 2 Thessalonians? (2 Thess 1:3)

He is thankful that their faith in Christ and their love for each other has been increasing. This is what Paul longed for, as we see from his first letter to the Thessalonians (see 1 Thess 3:6-7, 3:12, 4:9-10)

In what context was their faith increasing and their love growing? (2 Thess 1:4)

The Thessalonians were being severely persecuted. It was a difficult place to be a Christian.

REFLECT: For a genuine believer, why do persecutions/trials grow our faith in Christ and love for others? [In our difficult times, we look to God for help, and His support causes us to love Him and others]

For a non-genuine believer, what do persecutions/trials do (Luke 8:13)? [It causes them to fall away]

Paul links the words "perseverance" and "faith" in 2 Thess 1:4. How do they go together?

Genuine faith will show itself by perseverance (cf. Luke 8:15). Indeed, Jesus taught that only those who persevere to the end will be saved (Matt 24:9-13); this is because perseverance is the product of true faith.

According to 2 Thess 1:5-8, how does Paul encourage believers who are being persecuted?

Paul reminds them that God is just, and when Christ returns He will bring judgment upon those who persecute believers, and He will bring relief and salvation to those who are persecuted for Christ's sake.

REFLECT: If we're going through hardships as a Christian, we may feel God is not just in His treatment of us. What should we do if we feel like that? [We should remember what God is going to do one day]

How is the day of the Lord described here in 2 Thess 1:6-8? Why? (cf. also Matt 24:30-31)

Jesus shall return in blazing fire and with His powerful angels. In other words, the Lord Jesus is returning to judge and punish all those who have not loved Him and who have persecuted His followers. At the same time, this will result in Christians being delivered from persecution and brought into Christ's glory.

According to this passage what makes a person "worthy of the kingdom"? (2 Thess 1:5, 11)

We are counted worthy when we suffer for Christ; when we are maligned and persecuted for Christ's name.

When Christ returns, who will bear Christ's wrath and judgment? (2 Thess 1:8)

It isn't just those who give Christians a hard time who will be judged, but everyone who has not come to know God personally through Christ, and who has not repented of their sins and obeyed (followed) Christ.

Contrast what will happen to the non-Christian and the Christian from 2 Thess 1:9-10.

The non-Christian will face everlasting destruction. They will not only endure Christ's wrath on earth, but will be separated from God forever, and suffer eternal punishment and torment in hell (Matt 25:41, 46).

Christians, on the other hand, will glory at Christ's return and will always be with Him (1 Thess 4:17).

In the light of God's justice and Christ's return, what does Paul pray for? (2 Thess 1:11-12)

He prays that according to God's grace and enabling, they might patiently suffer for Christ, and grow in faith and love and good works, so that Christ may be glorified. This is what it's all about – Christ's glory.

Memory Verse: 2 Thess 1:12 "We pray 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."

Summary: God is just; He will deliver us. May we be faithful in suffering for Christ for His glory.

2. The Coming of Christ: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Review: *How does Paul encourage the Thessalonian believers as they face persecution? (2 Thess 1:5-8)*
Paul reminds them that God is just, and when Christ returns He will bring judgment upon persecutors.

Whether we are persecuted or not what does Paul desire believers to do? (2 Thess 1:11-12)

He desires them to suffer worthily for Christ, to abound in good works, and to glorify Christ.

Review Memory Verse: 2 Thess 1:12

Discuss: *There are many thoughts in regard to what will happen or what will not happen before Christians are taken out of this world at Christ's return. Is it important to work this out? Why or why not?*

Bible Text: Read 2 Thess 2:1-12

Considering the Text:

In 1 Thessalonians Paul had given some teaching on the Lord's return, and the need to be ready and alert, but what erroneous teaching had someone brought? How had it been brought? (2 Thess 2:1-2)

Someone had sown the idea amongst the Thessalonian Christians that the Lord Jesus had already come. It seems they did it cunningly, by purporting to speak on behalf of Paul.

What had this false teaching done? (2 Thess 2:1-2)

It had unsettled some of the believers. Some may have thought that they had missed out being saved.

REFLECT: *Jehovah Witnesses believe that Jesus returned quietly and invisibly in 1914. How would you answer them? [Jesus' return will not be invisible or quiet – see Matt 24:30, 1 Thess 4:16-17, Rev 1:7]*

What is Paul's proof that the day of the Lord had not come? (2 Thess 2:3)

The day of the Lord cannot come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.

What does Paul mean by the "rebellion" in 2 Thess 2:3?

The rebellion is the apostasy, or the falling away from the Christian faith. Many will fall away from following Christ, as Jesus prophesied in Matt 24:9-10. This will especially be due to intense persecution.

REFLECT: *Who will fall away from the Christian faith during the end times? Will genuine Christians? [According to Scripture, genuine believers will not fall away. It will be those who were false or pretend believers – consider the assuring words of John 6:39-40; John 10:27-30; Phil 1:6]*

Who is this "man of lawlessness", that is mentioned in 2 Thess 2:3-4? (see also Rev 13:1-4)

He is known as the "beast" in Rev 13:1. He will be Satan's Christ and he will seek to oppose the worship of God or any other worship, and will seek to direct all worship to himself and to Satan (Rev 13:4).

What else do we learn about the man of lawlessness from 2 Thess 2:9-10?

He will use Satan's power to perform wonders in order to deceive people to follow him, rather than Christ. Jesus taught in Matt 24:24 that he will perform signs even to mislead the elect, if it were possible.

Paul tells us in 2 Thess 2:7 that the "secret power of lawlessness" is already at work. How?

Even before the man of lawlessness is revealed, Satan is using "anti-Christ" to mislead people, so that they do not follow Christ, but himself (1 John 2:18). He seeks to blind us to the truth about Christ (2 Cor 4:4), and to get people to indulge in their sinful desires in order to disobey God (Eph 2:1-3).

What is holding back the "man of lawlessness" from reigning now? (2 Thess 2:6-7)

It seems Paul had told the Thessalonians about this, but we don't have it explicitly shared. As a result, there is quite a variation of answers from Bible scholars. Some believe it is the church holding him back. Others believe it is the Holy Spirit, and when God permits, room will be given for him to exercise his authority.

Though we may not know what holds the "man of lawlessness" back at present, what triumphant words should we concentrate on? (2 Thess 2:8)

At His return, the Lord Jesus will overthrow the "man of lawlessness" effortlessly. The most powerful human leader who has ever lived, and who has access to all Satan's power, will be overthrown instantly. Indeed, he was doomed to destruction before he ever rose to power (2 Thess 2:3b), for it is the Lord God who truly rules this universe, and who overrules Satan and his anti-Christ.

Why will God cause people to believe the lies and delusions of the lawless one? (2 Thess 2:10b-12)

He will do this because they refused to love the truth (the Gospel of Christ). They did not believe the truth as it is in Jesus, but instead, they delighted in and practiced wickedness. They did not follow Christ.

Memory Verse: 2 Thess 2:8 "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming."

Summary: Christ hasn't come yet, until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.

3. Persevering for Christ: 2 Thessalonians 2:13 – 3:5

Review: *What must happen before the Lord Jesus returns? (2 Thess 2:1-3)*

Jesus won't return until there is the falling away and the rise to power of the man of lawlessness.

What will the man of lawlessness do, and what will happen to him? (2 Thess 2:4-9)

He will rule the world and deceive many by his power and false wonders, in order to be worshipped. But the Lord Jesus will effortlessly overthrow him when He returns in power and great glory.

Review Memory Verse: 2 Thess 2:8

Discuss: *Things are going to get tough, even here in Australia, as we await the return of Christ. There will be a great turning away and the increase of lawlessness. What can we do to help us not fear?*

Bible Text: Read 2 Thess 2:13 to 3:5

Considering the Text:

Despite the persecution the Thessalonian believers faced, as well as knowing the difficult times we will endure as we await Christ's return, how does Paul encourage the believers? (2 Thess 2:13-14)

He reminds them that they are loved of the Lord, that God chose them to be saved, that God called them to be saved, and that they would share in Christ's glory. How do these truths make you feel when it's tough?

REFLECT: *2 Thess 2:13-14 gives a right emphasis on God's part and our part in our salvation. What has God done? What have we done? [God has done everything. He has loved us, chosen us, set us apart, and called us to be in Christ and to be saved. We have simply responded by faith to all that God has done]*

What is the Spirit's work in our salvation? (2 Thess 2:13; cf. also John 16:8; Titus 3:5)

God's Spirit has set us apart (sanctified us) from others who are unsaved, by convicting us of our sin and our need for Christ, and by regenerating and renewing us. Without the Spirit's work we would still be lost.

We have been loved, and chosen and called to share in the glory of Christ. What is this glory?

When Christ returns we will forever be with the Lord (1 Thess 4:17). We will be with Him in glory, around the Father's throne (Rev 7:15-17), dwelling in our Father's house (John 14:1-3). What glory!

In the light of what God has done for us through Christ, what should we do? (2 Thess 2:15)

We should stand firm in God's truth, persevering in Christ, despite the things we may have to endure, and the attacks of Satan (cf. Eph 6:10-14, and the strong emphasis on "standing firm").

Besides the word of truth, what also do we have so that we might persevere? (2 Thess 2:16-17)

We have encouragement and strength and hope from God our Father and the Lord Jesus. Indeed, we have **eternal** encouragement, and **good** hope for all our days on earth, because of God's love and grace.

REFLECT: *We have a wonderful hope. Consider the following verses about our hope in God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ: Rom 5:3-5; Titus 2:11-13; Heb 6:18-20; 1 Peter 1:3.*

In 2 Thess 3:1-2, Paul requests three things for prayer. What are they?

We ought to pray that the message of the Lord (the Gospel) will spread rapidly, that it may be honoured (ie, people will respond positively to it), and that we may be delivered from evil people who oppose us.

From Paul's prayer request in 2 Thess 3:1-2, what should really matter the most to us?

We should be concerned about the Gospel – it should be our great desire to share this message of hope with others, and to pray that people may respond and be saved. There is no hope without the Gospel.

It can be dangerous sharing the Gospel. What promise do we have in 2 Thess 3:3? (cf. 1 John 4:4)

God will strengthen and protect us, not only from evil men, but from the devil. He is faithful and stronger!

In 2 Thess 3:4, Paul has confidence in the Thessalonians as they follow Christ. Why?

Paul is confident because he knows that God is faithful and is at work in the Thessalonians (cf. Phil 1:6).

What two things does Paul direct them to so that they may persevere in Christ? (2 Thess 3:4-5)

Paul directs them to God's love and Christ's perseverance. There is nothing more important than these two things – persevering in Christ, standing firm, and even evangelism and worship come from them.

Consider the following verses on God's love for us: Psalm 103:9-11; Rom 5:8, 8:38-39; 1 John 3:1, 4:9-10. How should these verses on God's great love for us help us?

God's great love for us in Christ should help us not fear, but be greatly encouraged and strengthened.

How should Christ's perseverance, seen in Heb 12:1-3 & 1 Pet 2:21-25, impact us?

Christ's perseverance and what He accomplished for us, should inspire us to persevere too – it's worth it.

Memory Verse: 2 Thess 3:5 "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."

Summary: Persevere for Christ – You are loved of God and Christ persevered for you.

4. Working for Christ: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

Review: *What should Christians be so thankful for, despite hardship and persecution? (2 Thess 2:13-14)*
We are loved of God, chosen of God, and been set apart and called, and will one day enjoy Christ's glory.

How can we persevere for Christ and stand firm to the end? (2 Thess 2:16-17, 3:5)

We need to trust that God, by His grace, will give us the comfort and strengthen we need. On our part, we need to direct our hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance, in order to help us endure.

Review Memory Verse: 2 Thess 3:5

Discuss: *Like in other organisations, the local church can suffer from the "twenty, eighty principle"; ie, 20% of the people do 80% of the work. What can cause us to be part of the 80% group?*

Bible Text: Read 2 Thess 3:6-18

Considering the Text:

In 2 Thess 3:6-12, what key command does Paul teach the Thessalonians (and us)?

We are not to be idle, and we are also not to associate with idle people.

What type of idleness is Paul challenging the Thessalonians over? (cf. 2 Thess 3:10)

He is challenging them over idleness in regard to earning one's keep; it's not in regard to spiritual idleness, or in regard to neglecting church service, but idleness when it comes to supporting yourself.

REFLECT: *What do you think may have caused the Thessalonian Christians to be idle? [We think that they were idle because they thought the Lord's return was so imminent that they didn't need to work]*

What example did Paul give in regard to not being idle? (2 Thess 3:7-9)

Even though Paul had a right for others to support him as he served as a minister of the Gospel, he chose to work in order to provide his own keep. He never even took anyone's food without paying for it. In this way, he set an example of how we should work as well, for our keep.

What's the other reason why Paul laboured to support himself? What can we learn from this?

He didn't want to be a burden to anyone (cf. 1 Thess 2:9). We, also, should seek to live life as best we can, where we are not a burden to others.

REFLECT: *Should we enforce that no fellow Christian should be a burden to others? Why or why not? [No! There are those who legitimately need support. For example, when Paul addressed the need to support widows, he gave instructions as to who should be supported and who should not – 1 Tim 5:16]*

When we are idle, what dangers do we face? (2 Thess 3:11; cf. also 1 Tim 5:11-15))

We can become busybodies, getting ourselves into other people's business. We can also become gossips, and even be led astray by various desires and temptations. It is good and safe for us to be doing things.

REFLECT: *In our society, many of us face the opposite problem; not idleness, but "busy-ness". What is the danger of being too busy at our work? [Neglect our devotional time with the Lord, neglect our family, neglect the need to take time out to witness to others, neglect to rest and de-stress our body]*

What does Paul urge the Thessalonians and us to do in 2 Thess 3:13?

We are never to tire in doing what is right. It is a right thing to not be a burden to others; it is a right thing to do our best in supporting ourselves and others. Indeed, there are many other right things to do, so that we never become idle; both spiritually and physically. Jesus was never idle; He rested, but was never idle.

Why does Paul command believers to not associate with idle people? (2 Thess 3:6, 14)

An idle person can have a detrimental effect on us. Not only can they cause us to become idle, but they often do a lot of talking, and end up gossiping about others, and then we can be caught up in this.

When it comes to dealing with an idle believer, what balance do we need to preserve?

We are not to associate with them (ie, support their idleness), not just so that we don't get caught up with idleness, but that they be challenged and become repentant of their idleness. Like for any brother caught in sin, we are to lovingly warn them and call them to repentance. They are not our enemy (cf. Jam 5:19-20).

In order to encourage the believers at Thessalonica who were being persecuted severely, what does Paul share as he concludes his letter? (2 Thess 3:16-18)

With the very words he began with (see 2 Thess 1:2), Paul desires that they know and enjoy God's peace continually, and that God's grace (His undeserved favour) may be with them. There is no better thing in life than to experience God's peace and grace – cf. John 14:27; Phil 4:7; 1 Cor 1:3-8.

Memory Verse: 2 Thess 3:13 "And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right."

Summary: Don't be idle for Christ – work well for Him as a good servant of Christ.

5. Living In View of Christ's Return: Summary of 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Review Previous Memory Verse: 2 Thess 3:13

Over the past two terms we have studied 1 & 2 Thessalonians. There has been a memory verse after each lesson, and whether you have learnt them or not, as a group, reflect on each of them. They are listed below:

- 1 Thess 1:5a "Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction."
- 1 Thess 1:9b-10 "You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead; Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."
- 1 Thess 2:4a "speak as men and women approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel".
- 1 Thess 2:13 "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. "
- 1 Thess 3:13 "May the Lord strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."
- 1 Thess 4:11 "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you."
- 1 Thess 4:16 "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first."
- 1 Thess 5:9 "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."
- 1 Thess 5:16-18 "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."
- 1 Thess 5:23 "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- 2 Thess 1:12 "We pray 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."
- 2 Thess 2:8 "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming."
- 2 Thess 3:5 "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."
- 2 Thess 3:13 "And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right."

In 1 & 2 Thessalonians, we have much teaching on Christ's return. Considering what we have studied, how should we feel about death? (1 Thess 4:13-17)

When a Christian dies we should not grieve as those who have no hope, for we know that they have gone to be with Jesus, and will return one day with Him, at His glorious return. We also should not fear our own death – we truly go to be with Jesus. He has conquered death for us (John 11:25-26)

How will Christ return at His second coming? How should we feel? (1 Thess 4:16; 2Thess 2:8)

The Lord Jesus shall return powerfully, obliterating the man of lawlessness (the most powerful human ruler that existed, and who forced the world to worship him), and Christ shall come with power and great glory. We should feel so glad when He returns, for we are on His side – the victorious side. Also, He is coming back to receive us to Himself, so that we might always be with Him in glory.

Christians are persecuted in this world. How should Christ's return encourage us? (2 Thess 1:5-10)?

God shall take vengeance on our enemies when Christ returns. All those who persecuted Christians and did not repent, as well as all those who did not obey Christ's Gospel, shall be punished. On our part, we will be set free from persecution and enjoy eternal bliss in God's glory.

What two things must happen before Christ can return? (2 Thess 2:1-3)

Before the Lord Jesus returns, there will be a great apostasy (falling away from the faith), and the man of lawlessness will rise to power. After that, Christ will return.

How should we live as we anticipate Christ's return? (1 Thess 5:6; 2 Thess 2:15)

We ought to be alert, and not spiritually asleep, and we ought to stand firm, persevering to the end.

FINAL REFLECTION: Christians often don't think too much about Christ's return, and yet in the New Testament, believers' lives were beneficially shaped by it. In what way? What can we do to be the same?