

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

Verse By Verse Bible Studies

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THE GLORY OF HOPE

2 THESSALONIANS

by

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DEDICATION

To

Leon and Tommy

Friends and fellow servants

*You will never be accused of being
A reed shaken by the wind!*

PREFACE

As in the case of the study of the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, this study is still in the early stages of development. I think of it as a sort of pre-draft study, prepared or friends to use in teaching the Thessalonian Epistles in the 2000 Winter Bible Conference, scheduled each year throughout the Southern Baptist Convention. It is a part of the Bible Notebook series, which includes about twenty-five studies of various lengths.

My first published book is *UNDEFEATED: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble*, verse by verse commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians. For more information, contact me at 2396 Hwy. 552, Downsville, LA 71234. Ray Wells, Church, Minister Relations Director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention has this to say about these studies:

"I have used the Bible Study Notebooks of Dr. Johnny Sanders for a number of years. I have found that he brings together the best of exegetical study and flavors the study of God's word with the devotional insights that encourage, challenge, and assist me in Bible Study. Every year, when I find out what our Annual Bible Study is, I call Johnny and ask what he has on that book. His notes will be a valued tool for Pastors and other Ministerial teachers of God's word. For the Seminary graduate, this will bring together many of the sources that you would want to study. For the Minister that does not have the seminary background, Johnny's Bible Notebooks will give you the best Bible study and do it in language that you will be glad to use. For the Bi-Vocational pastor this work is a God-send for you in making the most of your study time."

– Ray Wells

The New American Standard Version will be used in this study unless otherwise noted. It is my prayer that God will bless you through the study of His precious and holy Word. Let us anticipate the coming of our Lord, and concentrate on what He wants us to do in the meantime.

INTRODUCTION

The second epistle to the Thessalonians was written soon after the first. The church was going through persecution (1:4-7), and some of the believers thought they were already in the Day of the Lord, that they were caught up in the tribulation in which the whole world will be judged. It seems that a letter, purportedly from Paul, had come to the church (2:1-2), or that one of the church prophets had given this false message during a public meeting. It was probably a pseudo-epistle. Paul writes to explain God's plan for the age and to encourage these suffering saints to remain true to the Lord. He points out the purposes behind their suffering.

Matthew Henry held that Paul had been told that, from some expressions in his first letter, many expected the second coming of Christ was at hand, and that the day of judgment would arrive in their time. As a result, some of them had neglected their worldly duties. Paul wrote again to correct their error, which hindered the spread of the Gospel.

He had written agreeably to the words of the prophets of the Old Testament; and he tells them there were many counsels of the Most High yet to be fulfilled, before that day of the Lord should come, though, because it is sure, he had spoken of it as near. The subject led to a remarkable foretelling, of some of the future events which were to take place in the after-ages of the Christian church, and which show the prophetic spirit the apostle possess.¹

A SUGGESTED OUTLINE

By Warren Wiesbe

Greeting - 1:1-2

I. Encouragement in Suffering (1).

A. Suffering helps us to grow (1:3-5).

B. Suffering prepares us for glory (1:6-10).

C. Suffering glorifies Christ today (1:11-12).

II. Enlightenment about the Day of the Lord (2).

A. The apostasy must take place (2:1-3).

B. The temple must be rebuilt (2:4-5).

C. The Restrainer must be removed (2:6-12).

D. The church must be completed (2:13-17).

III. Establishment in Christian Living (3).

A. Prayer and patience (3:1-5).

B. Working and eating (3:6-13).

C. Hearing and doing (3:14-15).

Farewell—3:16-18.

Comparison of the themes of 1 and 2 Thessalonians

1 THESSALONIANS

1. Coming of Christ for the church
2. The present age of grace
3. The Spirit's work in the church
4. Summary of what he had taught

2 THESSALONIANS

1. Coming of Christ with His church
2. The future day of the Lord
3. Satan's work in the world, 2:7
4. Corrected false teachings they had heard

I. SALUTATION, 1:1-2

1:1 - PAUL AND SILVANUS AND TIMOTHY. *“To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...”* This epistle begins by naming the same three men mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 1:1. As in 1 Thessalonians, Paul was the author, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He spoke of himself in the singular (2 Thes. 2:5; 3:17); Silas and Timothy were with him and joined him in sending the epistle (Paul frequently used “we” - 1:3-4, 11-12, etc.). The same congregation received both letters. **“The church** is described as being **in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** As in so many places in the New Testament Epistles, Jesus Christ is placed on an equal level with God the Father. God is the Father of Christians individually, a revelation given first by Jesus Christ (Matt. 6:9).”ⁱⁱⁱ A church is an assembly of individuals who are in Christ by faith in His atoning death and are therefore the children of God.

1:2 - GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE. Both grace and peace come only *“from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Here Paul uses the same two words in greeting the church that he uses in other epistles. “Grace” was the customary Greek greeting and “peace” the typical Hebrew greeting. Paul combines the two greetings here, and in doing so, as this writer points out in his commentary of Philippians, he Christianizes the traditional Greek letter and at the same time he brings together the Jewish and Gentile believers. Grace is God’s unmerited love. Peace is that which comes as a result of God’s grace. Both are positive terms - active, and not passive in the Christian experience. The meaning of “grace” has been expressed with the acronym “God’s riches at Christ’s expense.” By God’s unmerited favor we were chosen - we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), and when we are saved, God freely bestows His grace on all who have accepted Jesus Christ’s substitutionary work for them on the cross by faith.

Grace is the “flip” side of mercy. When a condemned person pleads for mercy in a court of law, he is admitting his guilt, and pleading for a lesser penalty that the law prescribes. He may plead guilty to a one of several counts brought against him in a plea bargain for a reduced sentenced. But there are two point we must not forget: (1) he is guilty and ((2) if he receives mercy he will pay a lesser penalty than he deserves to pay. We are all guilty sinners and the “wages of sin is death” (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Because of what Jesus did for us on the cross we do not have to die for our sins -

if by grace, through faith, we receive Him as our Savior. I thank God for His mercy - but that is not all I need! Mercy means that I do not have to pay the price I deserve to pay for my sins. But God does not stop there. Not only do I not have to pay the full penalty I deserve to pay for my sins, I also receive that which I could never deserve - everlasting life. God gives me the very opposite of what I deserve - blessing instead of judgment. That is grace.

“Peace” is also a positive word. In a general sense peace denotes a cessation of hostility. And that is something we receive as a result of the death of Jesus Christ. God and His people are reconciled because the debt of human sin has been paid by His Own Son. **By** the grace of God, we have peace **with** God through the death of Jesus Christ. We also experience the peace **of** God as a result of Christ’s work.

Both grace and peace are gifts of God that come to believers through the Lord Jesus Christ. This cannot be emphasized too forcefully - both grace and peace are a gift from God and neither has anything to do with human merit. By the grace of God Christians may experience the peace of God, even in the midst of trials and persecution. This was what Paul desires for the Thessalonians saints.

In both Thessalonian epistles Paul uses the greeting “Grace and peace to you,” but here he adds “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Just as we see in the prologue to the Gospel According to John, the Father and the Son are One. It is amazing how one can read the epistles of Paul and reject the doctrine of the Trinity on grounds that the word “Trinity” does not appear in the New Testament. I can think of a lot of other words that do not appear in the New Testament: theologian, seminary, psychologist, computer, automobile, airplane - and I believe in all of them!

The concept of the Trinity is seen throughout the New Testament, as are the Persons of the Trinity. Francis Shaeffer stated at one point that if it had not been for the doctrine of the Trinity he would still be an agnostic. He had in mind the reason God created man. God did not create man, he reasoned, because of any deficiency in Himself - meaning that He did not create man in order to have someone with whom He might have a relationship (fellowship). Furthermore, fellowship with man was a vertical relationship only. In Heaven God has a vertical relationship with angels and He has a horizontal relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

II. THANKSGIVING AND ENCOURAGEMENT IN PERSECUTION, 1:3-12.

1:3 - GIVE THANKS. *“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...”* Thanksgiving is at once a duty and a joy. There were two reasons for Paul’s thanksgiving, two works of God for which he is grateful - their love for each other and their faith in God. The occasion for the thanksgiving was the knowledge that the inspired words of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians had borne fruit. Some of his concerns about their faith seems satisfied, and their love for one another was growing, so it was apparent that many, certainly not all, of the members had taken seriously the words of exhortation in the first epistle, especially those of 1 Thess. 5:12-25.

YOUR FAITH IS GREATLY ENLARGED. Paul's earlier fears about their faith (1 Thess. 3:5, 10) had been relieved by news of their exceptional growth - their faith was "greatly enlarged." How did Paul know that their faith was "greatly enlarged?" He must have had reports, but there is one point we must not forget - this is a product of the mind of the Holy Spirit and not of the mind of the great missionary. The divine Author knew that their faith had increased phenomenally.

People often thank God for their health and material blessings, but how often do we pause to thank Him for their spiritual growth? Is it possible that those who do not thank God for spiritual growth may have a valid reason for not thanking Him? If there is genuine spiritual growth we are conscious of what God is doing in our lives, but if we are not increasing in faith we may not be aware of what is missing in our walk with the Lord. The Israelites who were delivered from Egypt were permanently delivered from bondage, but because of their lack of faith they wandered for forty years in the wilderness, never seeing the Promised Land. They knew it was there but never enjoyed the fruit of the land.

God never sent the Israelites back to Egypt. He sustained them during their wanderings in the wilderness, giving the two things a loving and faithful Father should always give his children - provisions and protection. But there is a lot of difference in a mere subsistence (manna) and bounty (plentitude). Most Christians spend their entire life after they are delivered from bondage wandering in the wilderness (walking in the flesh), rather living in the land of promise (walking in the Spirit). They are not forced back in bondage to sin - any more than the Israelites were forced to return to Egypt. They are sustained by God, but they live on the food of the wilderness and complain all the way. Never do they enjoy the milk and honey of the land of promise (the fruit of the Spirit). I call them wilderness believers. What a waste!

It took a mighty act of God to bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt, and then forty years later it took another mighty act of God to bring them into the Land of Promise. Spiritually, it works the same way. It takes a mighty act of God to deliver the lost sinner from the bondage of sin, and it takes a mighty act of God to deliver the backslider from the wilderness of the flesh to the Promised land of the spirit. The person who is walking in the flesh does not simply choose to "turn over a new leaf" and start walking in the spirit. He must repent and receive God's forgiveness and restoration. You do not live the Christ-life for Him, He lives it in you - "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27b).

LOVE. In 1 Thess. 3:12, we see that they already loved one another and they loved other believers throughout the region. Their love had been well known when he wrote the first letter, but now he says, "*the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.*" Paul could use them as an example to other churches. Sadly, some would need it. The church at Ephesus, once known for their love, would within another generation, be condemned by the Lord for forgetting their "first love." When faith in God increases love for one another will increase. When there is a phenomenal growth in faith there will be an phenomenal growth in love for one another.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Dolly Madison, wife of the fourth president of the United States, was one of the most popular women in American history.

Wherever she went, she charmed and captivated everyone obscure and well-known, rich and poor, men and women alike. She was once asked to explain the secret of her power over others. Surprised by the question Mrs. Madison exclaimed, "Power over people. I have none. I desire none. I merely love everyone." And those who love are richly rewarded by love returned.ⁱⁱⁱ

Christian love is more than a feeling. It must be manifested in daily life and in life's decisions.

In our relationships with others, often what passes for love is little more than a neat business transaction. People are kind to us, so we repay them with equal consideration. When they treat us unjustly, our negative response is really what they asked for. Everything is so balanced, so fair, so logical with this eye-for-an-eye and tooth-for-a-tooth kind of justice. But Christian love never settles for only what's reasonable. It insists on giving mercy as well as justice. It breaks the chain of logical reactions.

General Robert E. Lee was asked what he thought of a fellow officer in the Confederate Army who had made some derogatory remarks about him. Lee rated him as being very satisfactory. The person who asked the question seemed perplexed.

"General," he said, "I guess you don't know what he's been saying about you."

"I know," answered Lee. "But I was asked my opinion of him, not his opinion of me!"^{iv}

Love is

Slow to suspect -- quick to trust.
Slow to condemn -- quick to justify.
Slow to offend -- quick to defend.
Slow to reprimand -- quick to forbear.
Slow to belittle -- quick to appreciate.
Slow to demand -- quick to give.
Slow to provoke -- quick to conciliate.
Slow to hinder -- quick to help.
Slow to resent -- quick to forgive.
-- The Baptist Challenge^v

1:4 - WE SPEAK. *"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."* Paul often uses "therefore" transitionally, in moving from an argument (statement) to a conclusion. Because of the phenomenal growth of their faith, their perseverance in the face of persecution, and their increased love for one another, Paul and his companions "speak proudly" of them to other churches, holding the Thessalonian church as a model to be emulated. Since he is writing from

Corinth we may assume that Paul uses the faith of the Thessalonians to challenge and motivate the Corinthians, but he has apparently referred to their faith in other churches.

PERSEVERANCE. Specifically, Paul boasts of the faith of the Thessalonian saints which was manifested in their perseverance in face of continuous persecutions and afflictions. The great martyr, Tertullian, wrote, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” History proves that it is true. A wise Chinese Christian said, “The suffering in China has multiplied the blessings because it has purified the church.” The Thessalonian Christians had a reputation for growing faith, abounding hope, and radiant love (1 Thes. 1:3); and their trials were causing their faith, hope, and love to grow.

“Tribulation produces perseverance” (Rom. 5:3, NKJV). Wiersbe is right:

“perseverance” in the New Testament is not simply “waiting it out”; it is steadfast endurance in the Lord, keeping going when the going is tough. The Christian who prays for more patience must expect more tribulation, for tribulation is the spiritual tool God uses to make us patient.

When suffering comes, it will either make us or break us. If we accept the suffering, yield to God’s will, and by faith continue to stand true, then the suffering will cause us to grow. If we resist the suffering, complain to God, and give up in unbelief, then the suffering will break us and weaken our testimony. See 1 Peter 4:12-19.^{vi}

Because of their perseverance their testimony was growing as well, for all the churches heard about them and their stand for the Lord. Paul was able to glory in them among all the churches. Their steadfast endurance was an encouragement to other believers. Jesus was persecuted and he prophesied persecution for His followers. Faith in Jesus Christ and perseverance in the face of persecution incites Satan and his minions to escalate persecutions against the saints. In America today multiplied millions of professing Christians may boast that they have never been persecuted for their faith. I would like to make two comments about that.

First, America was founded on Christian principles, despite what modern historians may be saying, and the Founding Fathers saw to it that we would be free to worship, serve, and witness for the Lord. In recent decades, since America entered the post-Christian era, Christianity has fallen more and more into disfavor with the elites liberals in politics, education, and social services who control a powerful segment of our society. Not too long after I graduated from seminary, I lamented the fact that in America at that time masses were not responding to the Gospel, they were not persecuting the saints, they were simply ignoring us. I warned that if we did not have an awakening we might well face persecution in the future. Today, physical torture of Christians is not happening in America as it is in so many parts of the world, but there is something else going on that is very disturbing. It is not physical torture, but resistance, opposition, scorn, and oppression. If you do not believe it check with those who legally protest at abortion clinics, those would like to see Creation taught in public schools, and those who would like to display Christian symbols in public places.

There were reports on talk radio programs, August 12, 1999, that the United Nations will take action that would end legal protection of confidentiality in confessions of the Catholic Church. In other words, the United Nations, with the support of the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and France (according to some reports) would force a Catholic priest to reveal what parishioners say in the confession booth. If they go after the Catholic priests today, who will they go after tomorrow? We must not be lulled to sleep by the lack of persecution in America. Satan works incrementally, one step at a time. Satanic movements and individuals use their master's methods.

The second observation I would make about the lack of persecution of believers in America is that the faith of so many Christians is so anemic that Satan is not overly concerned about what we are doing. But if the faith of believers leads them to assert an influence on society as both salt and light, you can count on opposition and even persecution. You can persecute someone without using physical torture. Christianity is losing ground in the moral arena in America. In fact, I fear that we have already lost the moral high ground, and it has not been taken from us. Rather, it has been given over to the dark forces of this world by people who profess a faith in God.

Anyone who has made a serious study of the manipulation of information by the national media for the last half of the Twentieth Century will see how easily the masses can be, and are being duped in the land of the free and the home of the brave. A man who has spent years in the broadcasting and telecasting business recently confided in me that the heads of the major networks meet regularly in New York and they when the evening news comes on TV, all four networks will almost invariably begin with the same lead story - day by day and week by week. Often, he claims (without providing me with proof, I might add), the top three of four stories will be presented in the same order of sequence on all four networks. They give it the same slant, and usually when one stays away from a story they all stay away from it. During the Clinton Administration, there were a number of times when we never would have found out about some of scandals involving high placed officials if a London newspaper had not forced their hand by printing the story.

The Thessalonians believers did not run from their troubles, nor did they hide when the going got rough. "Instead they viewed their circumstances as God's will and determined to brace up under the pressure. Their attitude was not to endure by force of their own strength, however. They had faith in God; they looked to Him for grace sufficient to bear up and accepted their circumstances as conditions which He was allowing for His glory."^{vii} They were being subjected to trying circumstances imposed on them by both Jewish and Gentile elements in Thessalonica (1 Thes. 1:6; 2:14; Acts 17:5-9). See the message of Jesus on persecution in the letters to the Seven churches of Asia Minor.

1:5 - GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT. *"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."* This verse builds on the previous verse - there were no verse divisions in the Greek. The saints at Thessalonica had demonstrated their faith in the face of persecutions and afflictions - persecution by others and afflictions that are not directly caused by others. They may be indirectly caused by others, they may be unintentionally by others, or they may not have anything at all to do with the enemies of the Cross. Paul points out to his readers that their present experiences illustrated

the righteous judgment of God, that is, that God is just. We need to be careful that we do not miss his point here. Their perseverance in the persecution and afflictions was proof of God's righteous judgment. "David (Ps. 73:1-14) and Jeremiah (12:1-4) were perplexed at the wicked prospering and the godly suffering. But Paul makes this fact a matter of consolation. It is a proof of the future judgment, which will rectify the present anomalies—by rewarding the now suffering saints and by punishing the persecutors."^{viii}

We also need to see what Paul is not saying. He is not saying that all suffering is the result of sin; he is not saying that all persecution comes as God's judgment for our sins; and he is not saying that perseverance in trials will give one access to Heaven. No one can earn heaven by suffering, any more than he earns it through good works, but by endurance in trials does demonstrate the believer's worthiness. A Christian can only be made worthy by God's grace, which he receives as a free gift by faith in Jesus Christ. "His trials simply expose what is there already and since the character that emerges through the fire of testing is God-given, God receives all the glory. The grace of God that makes it possible for a Christian to withstand the fires of human experience, which destroy non-Christians, is a Christian's only claim to being worthy of God's kingdom"^{ix}

There was a positive side of their afflictions. The afflictions that were designed to hinder or stop them actually had the opposite effect. By the grace of God they persevered and by persevering they brought glory to the Lord and to His Kingdom. They were judged worthy through their suffering. It demonstrated that they had been made worthy of God's kingdom. "Endurance in suffering proves that God's judgment of them was right and shows their fitness for the kingdom."^x

1:6 - IT IS ONLY JUST. "*For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.*" God is just. He defines justice. Suffering saints, then and now, cry out for vindication today, trusting in the fact that God is a just God. He is just in all His dealings and there will be no miscarriage of justice when he judges those who have inflicted pain on His people. As the sovereign Lord over the universe, God is the just Judge who holds all persons accountable to Himself. There has never been a miscarriage of justice in His court. "Suffering, especially religious persecution, may cause us to doubt God's justice. When we look back, we can see how God has worked to allow us to grow in endurance and faith. This gives evidence of His justice."^{xi} We can be sure that our faith will ultimately be vindicated and God will ultimately punish the unjust persecutors.

1:7 - RELIEF. "*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...*" When Jesus comes to pronounce judgment on unbelievers, He will receive praise from all Christians. God's judgment will be a relief to the Thessalonians, as it will to Paul and his fellow missionaries, who knew what it was to be under persecution and pressure for their faith (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14-18). Some believers will know no relief from suffering in this life time, but all believers are promised relief when Jesus returns to judge those who have afflicted His people (v. 6). "Of course, those who die experience relief from suffering at death, but they (as well as those who live) will not be vindicated until their enemies are punished (cf. Rev. 6:9-11, where those who have died were waiting in heaven for vindication over their enemies on earth)."^{xii}

IN FLAMING FIRE. According to this passage (vv. 8-7), Jesus Christ will be revealed with His mighty angels in flaming fire, meaning that He is coming as the Great Judge, surrounded by angels, sending fire from heaven upon the enemies of the Cross. Does this speak of the judgments of the Tribulation period or His coming to rule all nations (Ps. 2; 8; Rev. 19:11-20:6)? Those who believe in a Pre-tribulation Rapture think these verses

should not be confused with the earlier event of the Rapture, which features no overt acts of punishment of the world and is described in 1 Thess. 4:13-18. The word translated "revealed" is actually a noun, and it means "an unveiling," "a disclosure." Of the 22 uses of this word in the Greek N.T., 13 are in Paul's epistles. The vengeance described here is not vindictive but is the proper administration of justice (see John 5:22) toward those who "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8). Here "obey" serves as a synonym for saving faith.^{xiii}

Others point to "the penalty of eternal destruction" in verse 9 as a proof text. They see this as a reference to the fires of hell, as the following quote will illustrate:

The prospect of punishment upon the unbelieving and disobedient will accompany the revealing of Christ at His second coming. The punishment will be everlasting in nature. In substance it will involve separation from God. Such a display of divine power will be a marvel to believers, even as His coming will mean glory for the people of God. Punishment of unbelievers is based on God's justice (v 6).^{xiv}

The flaming fire of God's judgment is an awesome thing to consider, calling to mind "the divine manifestation in the burning bush (Exod. 3:2) and the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:18). Also, it shall accompany Christ's presence in the kingdom (Dan. 7:9, 10). Fire is a symbol of glory and vengeance (Heb. 10:27; 12:29; 2 Pet. 3:7, 10)."^{xv}

1:8 - DEALING OUT RETRIBUTION. Jesus will return with His mighty angels, "*dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*" At this time, Jesus is going to punish two classes of people. The first are those who are ignorant of God ("those who do not know God." See Rom. 1:18-32 for more on this). The second class of people to be punished are "those who do not obey the gospel," those who have heard the Gospel and refused to obey it (John 3:36). "The guilt of those in the latter group is the greater because their privilege is greater. God's judgment is perfectly just. Willful rejection of God's revelation spurns God."^{xvi}

1:9 - THE PENALTY OF ETERNAL DESTRUCTION. "*These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power...*" Regardless of what position one takes with reference to the Rapture and the Tribulation, there is no mistaking this point: all unbelievers, including both classes mentioned in verse 8, face "eternal destruction." This is not annihilation, "but ruin by reason of separation from the presence of the Lord. In 1 Thess. 5:3 the destruction is said to be sudden; here it is eternal."^{xvii} Furthermore, it points to the eternal fires of hell. Separation from God as punishment has received a lot of emphasis

in recent years, but it is possible that we have not stressed strongly enough that spiritual death means an eternity in hell. We are talking about conscious, eternal torment.

The destruction facing these two groups is explained here. For their rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ they “will pay the penalty” and that penalty is eternal destruction. “This is “the most express statement in St. Paul’s Epistles of the eternity of future punishment.”^{xviii} The punishment for those who refuse to obey the Gospel will never end - there will be no annihilation, no escape. It will continue throughout eternity and those being punished will be conscious every second. This effectively contrasts eternal death as opposed to eternal life.

AWAY FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD. This reveals the nature of the destruction - eternal separation from the presence of the Lord, which to the lost person during his life time may not seem so great, but in fact it is the very essence of eternal punishment. The presence of the Lord is what makes Heaven really Heaven. The unbeliever will be eternally cut off from His presence (Rom. 1:18; 2:5-9; 6:21; Phil. 3:19; 1 Thes. 1:10; 4:17).

When the Lord returns to earth with His church, He will judge the wicked who will then be living on earth. They will suffer eternal hell for two reasons - as already noted - they would not come to know God (willful ignorance, Rom. 1:18-32), and they would not obey God (willful disobedience). God commands sinners to repent (Acts 17:30); rejecting Christ is disobedience. The world will not be expecting Christ’s sudden return, nor will it be ready for His judgment (Rev. 19:11-21). Wiersbe lists the order of events:

- (1) the secret return of Christ in the air for the church, which can happen at any time;
- (2) the Day of the Lord (1 Thes. 5:1ff); (3) the rise and increase in power of the Man of Sin; (4) the sudden return of Christ to the earth with the church; (5) judgment on sinners and the binding of Satan for 1,000 years (Rev. 19:11-20:3).^{xix}

Needless to say, amillennialists and postmillennialists will disagree with Wiersbe. A literal reading of this passage is essential to an understanding of eschatology.

1:10 - TO BE GLORIFIED. “*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.*” When Christ returns He shall be glorified, not **by** His saints, but **in** them. We cannot add to the glory that is already His, but we can reflect His presence in us. He is glorified by what He has done in and through us. “Christ in the believers, previously the hope of glory (Col. 3:4), will then be the reality of glory shining out through all the transformed and transfigured saints.”^{xx}

IN HIS SAINTS. The word “saints” is another word for Christians in the New Testament. They are people who are set apart by the grace of God for the glory of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Christians await the day when Jesus returns to the earth. Jesus Christ will be glorified on the day of His glorious return in and through those who have placed their trust in Him.

THAT DAY. “That Day” is the Day of the Lord, the day when God will manifest His glory over

all opposition (1 Thess. 5:1, 2). “It begins with the opening of the Tribulation (Rev. 4-19) and comes to a close with the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth (see Rev. 21; 22). It will be a time of retribution, redemption, and restoration as God makes all things right.”^{xxi}

OUR TESTIMONY WAS BELIEVED. This statement is added parenthetically to affirming the fact that these Thessalonians would share in the afore mentioned glory because they had believed the Gospel. All who place their trust in Jesus Christ will share in His glory. Paul wrote to the Roman church:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified (Rom. 10:28-30).

1:11 - WE PRAY FOR YOU. “*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.*” Christians should pray with a purpose and that is exactly what Paul says he was doing (“to this end”). He continually prayed for the saints. Intercessory is one of the greatest ministries the believer can have. Paul prays “that our God will count you worthy of your calling.” When you pray for others for what do you pray?

He does not say that they deserve to go to Heaven, for they are not worthy of His grace. But He calls individuals on the basis of His grace and He fulfills His purpose through deeds in the life of a believer who is moved by faith. Through such fulfillment the Lord indicates the disciple's worthiness. In response to genuine faith God takes the initiative in accomplishing His purposes. The second coming of our Lord (vs. 10) casts its light over all Christian actions, so that we do everything to bring glory to Christ. “Our enduring faith issues in faithful acts to fulfill good purposes He has given us. Such active faith based on hope proves worthy of His call to discipleship and to heaven.”^{xxii} The lost are destined for hell because they are not worthy; the saints are destined to go to Heaven because they are made worthy by Christ our Lord.

Paul also prays “that our God will...fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power.” That which God desires only God can fulfill. We are not saved by works and we are not sanctified by works, but we are saved unto good works (Eph. 2:8-10). God desires something for us we cannot produce on our own. These are not the works of the flesh but the works our Lord produces in and through us. What does he mean by “works of faith with power”? Is this power that which is manifested in the healing meetings advertised by some ministries? Speaking in other tongues? Slaying in the spirit? Where is God's power seen today?

Those who follow certain television ministries may well get the wrong impression. God does heal - I believe with all my heart in divine healing, it is the divine healer that concerns me. I believe in miracles, but I do not think we can visualize Jesus until we create his image in our mind and then

assign Him tasks. Where do we see a greater manifestation of the power of Almighty God than in the regeneration of a lost soul? We also see the power of God manifested in the lives of His children as they walk with Him, serve Him, and witness for Him.

What we must remember is the promise Jesus made before the Ascension: “You shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you.” Every person who has been born again has received the Holy Spirit, so the source of power is available to each believer. The Holy Spirit, Who indwells all believers, will empower each believer to be a witness for Jesus Christ - provided the individual permits the Holy Spirit to totally fill his life. However, His power is never realized when the believer quenches the Holy Spirit by failing to avail himself of that power, or grieves the Holy through sin.

Paul tells us that Jesus Christ shall be glorified in His saints in that day (v. 10). Christians should seek to glorify Him every day. Paul prays that these believers might fulfill God’s purpose in their lives, and that the name of Christ might be glorified through them. “Paul’s ministry was the Word of God and prayer (see Acts 6:4). He taught the people God’s truths, then prayed for them to live out what he had taught them.”^{xxiii}

Christians can be confident in a time of suffering because God has chosen us and will never forsake us. The good work that God begins, He will complete (Phil. 1:6).

If the sinful world seems to be winning the battle today, we can rest in faith, knowing that they will lose the battle tomorrow. Our responsibility is to live worthy of this high calling (v. 11) and to allow God to work out His perfect will in faith and power. Note the “twin truths” in this chapter: faith and love (v. 3); faith and patience (v. 4); faith and power (v. 11).^{xxiv}

What should Christians do when they face painful testing of their faith, trials, and persecutions?

- (1) They should thank God for His salvation.
- (2) They should thank God that Jesus is with them.
- (3) They should surrender to the will of God without complaining.
- (4) They should ask God for wisdom to understand His will.
- (5) They should watch for opportunities to witness and glorify God in every situation.
- (6) They should wait patiently until God’s purposes have been fulfilled.
- (7) They should try to determine whether their suffering is a test of their faith, or chastisement for unfaithfulness.

1:12 - THE NAME. “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.” The name above every name is Jesus. In the Bible one’s name stands for the person named, his nature, character, reputation, and behavior. So, in praying thus, Paul was asking that God would fully glorify Jesus Christ in these saints. The ultimate purpose of this prayer is the glory of God. “Specifically it was that God’s glory

might be manifested in and through the Thessalonians, both immediately (v. 12) and at the revelation of Jesus Christ (v. 10). When this happens, the vessels that manifest the glory of God are themselves glorified by association with Him. ^{xxxv} Fulfillment of this prayer rests in the grace of God.

This first chapter is a great encouragement for the believer in these trying days. Wiersbe summarizes chapter one:

The world is going downhill toward hell at breakneck speed. People do not want to hear or heed the Word of God. Faithful Christians are suffering while godless unbelievers prosper. It seems as though God has forsaken His own. Not so, says Paul. The believer can “rest” (v. 7)—and this word means “the relaxation of strain”—knowing that God is at work in the world. One day He will vindicate His own and bring vengeance on the lost. ^{xxvi}

III. CORRECTION CONCERNING THE DAY OF THE LORD, 2:1-17.

A . Its Relation to the Present, 2:1-2.

Once again, Paul is inspired to deal with end time matters. This chapter deals with the heart of his letter - his explanation about the Day of the Lord and the Man of Lawlessness. “ The Christians were “shaken” instead of established (1 Thes. 3:2, 13) because someone had falsely told them that the Day of the Lord was already upon them. “At hand” in v. 2 should be “already present.” Paul explains that certain events must take place before this day of wrath and judgment can come to the world. Paul had written what should have been sufficient information in the First Epistle, but some of the people had been confused by a false teacher who wrote a letter presenting what he purported to be new information - and apparently signed Paul’s name to the letter (vs. 2).

2:1 - NOW WE REQUEST YOU, BRETHREN. On the basis of his apostolic authority he might have commanded them. The Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the epistle could have commanded them through Paul. Rather, this is a request based on a personal relationship. He makes the request “*with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him...*”

Fellowship in the local church would be greatly enhanced if only God’s people would follow Paul’s example, not lording it over others, but humbly making requests on the basis of our relationship in Christ Jesus. “Brethren” is not used lightly by Paul, and we should not take it lightly today. Manipulation of others in business meetings, committee meetings, or behind the scenes is neither Scriptural or spiritual. It violates the most basic principles of the Second Great Commandment and the Golden Rule. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ consists of fraternal relationships among members - our only paternal relationship is with our Heavenly Father.

THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. Here Paul uses the personal name for the Savior (Jesus) and the primary title, (Christ) along with a favorite Pauline title (Lord). Jesus is Lord.

The title implies sovereignty, the sovereign right of Jesus Christ to reign in the hearts of believers.

In the Bible names are important. The various names in the Old Testament for God are especially important. Each name for the one true God carries almost unlimited significance.

1. LORD (YHWH, I AM, the Covenant Name for God) - He is the God Who is.
2. God (Elohim, He who has the power to create) - He is the God Who can.
3. Lord (Adonai, denoting sovereignty) - He is the God Who should (reign).
4. Father - He is the God who will (redeem, protect, bless).

In the New Testament we find the name Jesus, the NT equivalent of the OT name Joshua (Jehovah is my salvation). Jesus is Savior, and He is Lord. He never invites anyone to come to Him as Savior with accepting Him as Lord. He is either Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all.

“With regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus” might be paraphrased, “in the interest of the truth concerning, the Lord's coming. A letter to the Thessalonians from someone claiming to be Paul (vs, 2) had led some to believe that the day of Lord had already come. They should not have been misled because this letter was a denial of the prophetic message Paul had outlined the First Epistle to the church. In spite of what they had been taught by Paul, these people had been deceived by the letter and consequently, some of them believed that the persecution they were experiencing was a part of the great Tribulation judgment and that there was no rapture for which they might hope and pray. Paul moves here to put this rumor to rest. When Jesus does return to judge the world everyone will know it. He will destroy all opposition when He comes.

Paul is cautioning the Thessalonians not to be misled, or troubled by this inaccurate teaching. The words “had come” (*enesteken*, Gk.) could be rendered “is present,” “is now present,” or “stands near.” The tense of the verb implies that “the day of Christ” has drawn near and now stands near as an abiding result. With that in mind it is understandable that some expositors suggest that this phrase supports belief in the imminent return of Christ.

OUR GATHERING TOGETHER TO HIM. This is a reference to the rapture of the church (1 Thess. 4:13-18). This is the final gathering together of the saints to Christ, at his coming (see Matt. 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:17). “The Greek noun is nowhere else found in the NT except in Hebrews 10:25, said of the assembling together of believers for the universal gathering.”^{xxvii}

2:2 - THAT YOU NOT BE...SHAKEN. “*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.*” “Shaken” is literally, “tossed,” as ships tossed about by an angry sea (Eph. 4:14). The Thessalonian saints were being tossed about by false teachings concerning future events, and Paul seeks to bring them back to the doctrine he had taught them and to the truth as revealed in the First Epistle. He seeks to bring them back to sound doctrine (2:1-12) and to

proper living (3:6-15).

BY A SPIRIT OR A MESSAGE. The false teaching about future events was “by a spirit” (a prophetic utterance), or by a person professing to have a spirit of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:8-10; 1 John 4:1-3), or by a message (some spoken teaching), and by “a letter as if from us.” There had been some written communication, allegedly from Paul, stating that “the day of the Lord has come.”

Paul warns the Thessalonians that believing these false teachings was shaking their faith and causing their fears. This sounds like a satanic conspiracy because these teachings were coming from a number of sources, which tends to make false teachings more acceptable - and deadly. There is little wonder the new converts, who had never seen a copy of the New Testament, were shaken. The erroneous message which had reached these believers was that the day of the Lord had arrived and they were in it! But if this were so, the believers were wondering, how could Paul speak of the Lord’s return as preceding the day of the Lord? (1 Thes. 1:10) And what about those promises that they would not see God’s wrath? (1 Thes. 1:10; 5:9) “It is clear that Paul had taught them a pretribulation Rapture. Their confusion arose because they could not distinguish their present troubles from those of the day of the Lord.”^{xxviii}

DAY OF THE LORD. It seems, as already noted, that the believers thought their present troubles meant that the Day of the Lord had already come (based on false teaching). The source of these teachings is not given, but it definitely was not from their missionary preacher/teacher. Furthermore, he would provide a way by which they would know if a letter that claimed to be from him was genuine (He signed this one in his own hand, 3:17).

Paul warned the young congregation not to be easily misled by a prophecy, report, or letter which might be false. Not all prophetic comment is from God. Not all reports or letters are inspired. The best advice is to turn to the established and clearly inspired letters and words. All teaching about which we have questions can be measured in light of clear Scriptural teachings. Obviously the day of the Lord’s return has not occurred. Paul considered his oral and written instructions authoritative. The oral instructions were not preserved. His writing to the Thessalonians became part of Scripture.^{xxix}

B. Its Relation to the Apostasy, 2:3a.

The essential tenets of the basic approaches to the study of end time events are presented by this writer in his study of 1 Thessalonians (In the Bible Notebook Series). Only two of them are highlighted here.

(1) **Amillennialists** believe the man of lawlessness to be representative of those enemies of Christ who appear throughout history, rather than specific man of lawlessness. To them, the phrase is used on the same order as that found in 1 John 2:18 (Antichrists). In general, they see tribulation as the suffering and the affliction to which believers are subjected for their faith in Christ from generation to generation, rather than a specific eschatological Tribulation.

(2) **Premillennialists** believe that the day of the Lord awaits a time of rebellion and the appearing of a specific and unique man of lawlessness. They recognize the fact that lawlessness as a principle is already at work in society (v 7), but the personification of evil in a specific person has not yet been realized. These events are to be associated with a future time of intense tribulation, involving religious and political rebellion and persecution (See Matt. 24:21-22; Rev 13:1-10. Premillennialists see this future uprising of unprecedented evil as the backdrop of the return of Christ. He will ultimately put down evil and establish His kingdom.

In the New Testament different words are used in connection with end-time events. The man of lawlessness will be revealed (*apokalupto*). He will have a coming (*parousia*). From this passage we may infer that the man of lawlessness will imitate the return of Christ, but in reality he will be the servant of Satan, not of God. He will try to set up his rule over God's kingdom from God's place of worship, pretending to be God and declaring himself above all other gods. But Jesus Christ will be the victor and those who follow Him will share in His victory. Those who reject Him will face the same condemnation as the man of lawlessness.

2:3a - LET NO ONE IN ANY WAY DECEIVE YOU. Having stated the problem in Thessalonica, and having identified the sources of the false teaching, Paul now proceeds to warn his readers against being deceived. These believers must not be deceived by any person, no matter how credible he might appear to be, or by the way anyone might present his teaching, claiming the authority of God or godly men. New Christians tend to be gullible for two reasons; they are not yet grounded in the truth of God's Word (cf. Eph. 4:14), and they are eager for answers. But any Christian, if not careful, can be misled by impressive personalities, spectacular appeals, and what seems like an overwhelming amount of "proof." "The antidote to poisonous heresy is a good strong dose of the truth which Paul proceeded to administer."^{xxx}

A good example of the way people may be deceived today might well be the "Bible Code," which purports to be the secret to mysterious messages encoded in the Pentateuch which no one could possibly discover until the invention of powerful modern computers. On a special television program on the PAX network the host proclaimed that this program might "forever change the way you look at the Bible." That is warning enough to stay away from it! Who profits most if we look at the Bible in an unbiblical way? It certainly is not Jesus Christ!

Any time we study anything related to the Return of the Lord, we will do well to heed this advice - before anything else, be very careful that you are not deceived. Before Jesus prefaced His discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem, His return, and the end of the world, (Matthew 24) with this same warning. Many believers have been deceived by false teachers and carried away with strange doctrines on this subject. Some are easily deceived because they do not know the Scripture. Others know just enough to be dangerous. One man - who, by the way, was out of church - told me he could not understand the rest of the Bible, but he could understand Revelation. That is remarkable! That is like saying, "I do not know my ABCs or the multiplication table, but I have a degree in engineering." It reminds me of the man of mixed metaphors who declared, "I'm no rocket surgeon, but I'll tell you what I think..."

From time to time we hear of an individual or a group of people who has been misled by some modern day “prophet” to believe that Jesus is coming again at a specific time, and so they sell all their

possessions, or give them away and then sit back and wait for that date. Of course, in every case these so-called prophets have been wrong and the people have been deceived. I heard of one report of people who went back to those to whom they had given their property and asked them to return it, only to be surprised when the recipient of their material possessions refused to return it. I believe it was Dr. Wayne Ward said that, upon one of his visits to the place of the Ascension, he found a man living in a make-shift tent with all his worldly possessions in a small bundle. The man had discovered the actual time of the return of Christ and he wanted to be right there on the mount so that he would be the first person to see Him when He returned.

One thing that really concerns me about such deception is that it may either leave the deceived person in a false state of euphoria, or in a state of fear and anxiety. In order that we will not be deceived, there are certain things we should keep in mind. First, Paul is no more trying to deceive or confuse people than was Jesus Himself. Jesus is the master of communication, not confusion. Second, we do not know any more about end-time events than Jesus knew when He was one the earth and that which is revealed in Scripture. Thus, we must beware of extra-biblical “revelations.” Third, all eschatological prophecies are given to encourage believers and to give them hope, not to frighten them.

People are shaken (vs. 2) or deceived (vs. 3) for one primary reason. They do not know the Scripture. The cults prey on church members, people who profess to be Christians, but have little or no knowledge of the Word of God. We must study the Scripture and test everything by Scripture. Only the Scripture will stand the test of time and eternity - only Scripture, nothing else. Even diamonds are not forever, regardless of the commercials for the world’s largest diamond distributor. Science, philosophy, and psychology must all be tested by Scripture, never the other way around. The child of God must continually “grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

There is wide disagreement on the subject eschatology. Sincere students of the Word of God disagree, and not always agreeably. That is possibly the reason many do not want to get caught up in the debate. Some simply joke, “I’m a Pan-millennialist - I believe it will all pan out in the end.” We may read anything we want to into that. The late Dr. Howard Spell was academic dean and professor of Bible at Mississippi College for many years. When a student asked him about his position, he replied, “I am a Pro-millennialist. What ever the Lord does, I am for it.” Dr. Spell might have considered that a loaded question from a student who was trying to stir up a controversy, or it might have been his honest position. I do not think he was implying that we should not study the Scripture to try to understand what the Lord has revealed about the return of the Lord and all events associated with it.

I might add that I, like many other serious students of the word, am “pro-millennial” (pro-pre?) in that I am all for what God is doing and what He is going to do. I am all for that which I

understand, and since I trust Him I am all for what He is going to do that I do not yet understand. I just want to be **in on** what He is **up to!** This much I do know, any position on eschatology that leads us to violate the principles set for the in the Sermon on the Mount is a sinful position. Arrogance, pride, slander, and strife violate the very letter and the spirit of the Beatitudes.

APOSTASY. We must not be deceived, because the day of the Lord “...*will not come unless the apostasy comes first.*” The NKJV renders this verse, “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition....” Apostasy is a falling away, a rebellion (NIV) against God. The word is a composite of two words which combined means a “standing away from.” Some interesting commentary may be found on this subject. For example, are we speaking of apostasy in general, or The Apostasy? “The implication is that before ‘the day of Christ [the Lord]’ there will occur a marked falling away of professed believers. The use of the article indicates that Paul has in mind a specific apostasy.”^{xxxix} The apostasy is an aggressive and climactic revolt against God that will prepare the way for the appearance of the man of sin (see 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Tim. 3:1-5).

Ryrie adds a note on the man of lawlessness:

Although it is true that the forces of lawlessness were at work in Paul's time and are at work today (notice v. 7, "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work"), the man of lawlessness (also called "that lawless one," v. 8) is an individual of the future who will come to power during the tribulation days. John also recognized the presence of many antichrists in his time (1 John 2:18) as well as the coming of one great Antichrist in the future (Rev. 11:7; 13:1-10).^{xxxix}

Remember here that Paul had written in First Thessalonians to answer concerning the Rapture, and other end-time events. In this epistle he is seeking to correct false teaching they had received - some of which was wrongly attributed to Paul himself. In this passage he mentions three events which must occur before the judgments of the day of the Lord took place. They are:

- (1) The apostasy (2 Thes. 2:3).
- (2) The revealing of the man of lawlessness (vv. 3-4, 8).
- (3) The removal of restraint against lawlessness (vv. 6-7).

There is no indication here that we should dogmatically subscribe to a strict chronological order in these events. The apostasy is a revolt against God and a departure from a position once held. This rebellion, which will take place within the professing church, will be a departure from the truth that God has revealed in His Word; that is, a departure from sound doctrine. Of course, apostasy has characterized the church almost from its inception, but “Paul referred to a specific distinguishable apostasy that will come in the future (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 4:3-4; James 5:1-8; 2 Peter 2; 3:3-6; Jude). He had already told his readers about it (2 Thes. 2:5).”^{xxxix}

How will we know when the “apostasy” (“a falling away”) comes? Remember that it denotes a falling away from the truth of the Word of God, not the loss of salvation by genuine

believers. There were certainly false teachers in the church in Paul's day, but by and large the church was united on the truths of the Word of God. Even fifty years ago if you met another Christian, you knew he believed in the Word of God, the deity of Christ, and the salvation by faith in Christ. This is certainly not true of all professing believers today. We live in a day of skepticism even on the part of Christians. People say they are Christians, yet deny the deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Bible (fewer still believe the Bible is inerrant), and other key doctrines. This apostasy, or falling away from the truth, is promised in 1 Tim. 4 and 2 Tim. 3. Many believe we are "living in apostate days right now, which indicates that the coming of the Lord is near. The professing church (Christendom) has departed from the faith."^{xxxiv}

Stephen Olford (*The Way of Holiness*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 1998, pp. 156), does not have to remind us that satanic activity is rampant in America today. He writes:

Sorcery or witchcraft literally means drug-taking - the very situation we are in today - and this drug-taking is invading the church of Jesus Christ. What Aldus Huxley and others predicted has come to pass. People are seeking religious experiences through "kicks" of all kinds, and this is wrapped up in the occultism we see around us. Through the New Age movement(s) and other devices, Satan is on his last rampage before Jesus Christ comes back again. I don't remember any time in my life when I've seen such demonic oppression.^{xxxv}

My brother-in-law, Jimmy Furr leads conferences in the occult and New Age Movements across America for the Interfaith Witness Department of the Southern Baptist Convention. I am certified by the IFW Department to lead conferences on both subjects, so I am aware of the tremendous interest in the occult today. Many believers know someone who is involved in occultism, Satanism, and witchcraft, either as dabblers or serious practitioners. I have by my side as I write a folder of sketches made by a teenager who was seriously involved in Satanism. A teacher told me that in her school a student was sent home because he came to school in a trench coat similar to the ones worn by the murderers at Columbine High School on Colorado. His mother verbally assaulted the principle, using profanity and declaring that if her son chose to worship Satan it was none of the principal's business. The school board upheld the student. The student was back the next day with his trench coat - in ninety-plus temperatures.

Some of the student killers who have made headlines in the last few years were involved in the occult, a fact the national media seems to miss on a regular basis. I know because Jimmy Furr has been called in to confer with police and other officials. While some seminary teachers when I was in school were denying the existence of Satan, he was getting a solid foothold on the streets of America.

Satan is the power and influence behind the "falling away." If what we learn from Job's experience with Satan in the Old Testament, and from Jesus' encounter with him in the wilderness is any indication, you can be sure he is not afraid to go to church. In fact, there are pastors around today who are convinced they have seen him - not in traditional red union suit, horns, and tail, but in

the eyes of church members. How else can you explain the incredible number of forced terminations in churches during the last three decades of the Twentieth Century? I have in mind terminations in which there is not moral or doctrinal failure - only personality clashes and power plays.

I do not know how much more intense the apostasy will become but if it is in its ascendancy at this time, we had better get ready to meet the Lord. "Amen! Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev.22:20).

C. Its Relation to the Man of Lawlessness, 2:3b-4.

NOTE: I thought it would be interesting to go back and check the Broadman Commentary and compare it with the New American Commentary, both of which were published by Broadman (owned by the Southern Baptist Convention). Herschel H. Hobbs wrote the commentary for Broadman and D. Michael Martin for the NAC. I was immediately reminded of why I like the NAC better - it is a much more exhaustive commentary and I usually find more help from it. But I found Hobbs' introduction to this section interesting (I am not speaking disparagingly of Hobbs). Read his sage, though possibly guarded introduction:

One should approach this passage humbly and with an admission of a lack of understanding. Doubtless Paul's language was understood by his readers. But the key to full comprehension has been lost to modern people.^{xxxvi}

QUESTION: Would we say this of any other doctrine - Justification, Sanctification, Election? But to continue with Hobbs:

In God's own time it may be disclosed. Or it may be evident as the passage is fulfilled. Man's natural curiosity will lead him ever to speculate. But it should be recognized as such.

However, that is no reason why men should not study this passage reverently, bringing prayer and all of their knowledge to bear upon it. The present purpose is to examine it to point out relevant truths.^{xxxvii}

2:3b - THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS. Look at the verse altogether again: "*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...*" The NKJV has, "the man of sin." Paul used a tense for the verb "is revealed" which indicates that this revelation will be a decisive act that will take place at a definite moment in history (cf. vv. 6, 8). How do we identify the "man of lawlessness?" Is this the Antichrist? Various positions have been taken.

(1) Some have suggested that Paul was just speculating and should not be taken seriously. Anyone who accepts this epistle as inspired Scripture will reject this view.

(2) Some think it denoted some person living at that time, possibly a Roman emperor (emperor worship would become a common practice. In A. D. 40, Caligula had declared himself divine - these readers would have been aware of that. Subsequent history makes this claim null and void.

(3). Some have suggested that it points the Roman Catholic pope and the church hierarchy, but history has not revealed that to be true.

(4) Others see the man of lawlessness as a real person who is yet to be revealed. That seems the only tenable position based on this Scripture.

There are, of course, those who believe that the man of lawlessness is not actually a person, but simply the personification of evil and rebellion against God, but this passage will hardly justify that interpretation. A strict reading of the passage tells us that he will be fully associated with and characterized by “lawlessness” (“sin” in KJV). According to the notes in the Believer’s Study Bible, this is a phrase used to

refer to a personification of evil and sin in one who will resist the power and Person of Christ. He is to be identified with the first beast of Rev. 13, the little horn of Dan. 7; 8, and the "abomination" of Matt. 24:15. Antichrist, another designation of this person (cf. 1 John 2:18), is apparently a historical person who makes his debut in history at a crucial moment and thus receives incredible power and influence from Satan. His true character emerges at the midpoint of the Tribulation (cf. Dan. 9:24-27). Ultimately, he is destroyed at the return of Christ (2 Thess. 2:8) to the earth^{xxxviii}

The footnote in the Disciple’s Study Bible supports this:

Satan's power will not be curbed until the end time. At that time a "man of lawlessness" will lead Satan's forces against God and His people. He will personify evil--exalting self over God, claiming to be God, displaying supernatural powers and signs, and deceiving people. This final show of force by Satan and his cohorts will not succeed. The "man of lawlessness" will be destroyed by Christ's second coming.^{xxxix}

The man of lawlessness is also described as “the man doomed to destruction” (“the son of perdition,” KJV). The destruction to which he is destined is the extreme opposite of salvation. He is destined for everlasting punishment.

2:4 - OPPOSES AND EXALTS HIMSELF. *“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.”* Just who is the “man of lawlessness “who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped” (NKJV)? Are we talking about a literal man, a supernatural being, or simply a spirit of lawlessness? What has Paul taught them on this subject? Where did he get this information? These words were used in Daniel 11:36, 37, with the prophecy originally

fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes, who desecrated the Jewish temple. The words apply even more to the man of lawlessness. “The grandest delusion of this lawless agent of destruction is his pretension to deity. It is the ultimate expression of his rejection of divine law and the most eloquent justification of his ultimate destruction”^{x1} The NCWB opines that:

Each of the previous world kingdoms had one extraordinary person as its embodiment (Babylon had Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 2:38 ff.; Medo-Persia had Cyrus; Greece had Alexander and Antiochus Epiphanes, the forerunner of the antichrist). The final age will find its embodiment in the antichrist.^{xii}

The two parallel participles points to both the attitude and character of the man of lawlessness. “Opposes” points to his actions - he opposes all objects of worship. “Exalts” points to his attitude of supreme arrogance - he exalts himself above all gods and all forms of worship. Martin, in the NAC, says, “Thus it is no surprise that this opponent of God functions ‘in accordance with the working of Satan’ (vs. 9). ‘He will exalt himself’ translates a second participle descriptive not just of his action but of his character. The image is one of extreme arrogance.”^{xlii}

TEMPLE. Paul promises the rise of a world dictator, the “man of lawlessness...son of destruction” (v. 3). He is not talking about a world system, but a person who will head up a world system. This “man of lawlessness” stands in marked contrast with Christ, the Savior from sin. He is the son of destruction; Christ is the Son of God. He is the liar; Christ is the Truth. Wiersbe comments:

We commonly call this man “the Antichrist,” which means both “against Christ” as well as “instead of Christ.” This world ruler will be energized by the devil and will unite the nations of Europe in a great federation (the ten horns of Daniel’s image, Dan. 7). According to Rev. 17, the Antichrist will cooperate with the apostate world church in his rise to power, and then will destroy this religious system when he doesn’t need it anymore.

The program is as follows: (1) the church will be raptured; (2) the Antichrist will begin his rise to power in a peaceful way; (3) he will unite Europe and make a seven-year covenant with Israel to protect it (see Dan. 9); (4) after three and one-half years he will break that covenant and invade Israel; (5) he will abolish all religion and set himself up to be worshiped (Rev. 13); (6) at the end of the seven-year tribulation period (Day of the Lord), Christ will return to earth and destroy the Antichrist and his system. Both the OT and NT predict the return of the Jews to Palestine and the rebuilding of the Jewish temple. When the Antichrist sets himself up in the temple, this will mark the “abomination of desolation” of Dan. 11:31 and Matt. 24:15.^{xliii}

Obviously, postmillennialists and amillennialists will strongly disagree with Wiersbe. Some will no doubt reason, “How can they preach the imminent return of Jesus Christ, and at the same time insist that all these things will take place before He can return? How can we expect Him to return as a thief in the night, and at the same time teach that before He does return the second most holy place in all Islam will have to be destroyed and a third temple built in its place, and then one

man is going to have time to assert control over the world, and even take his seat in the new temple and demand to be worshiped before the return of the Lord?" The answer one arrives at is going to be determined by his beliefs about the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Second Coming to the earth, Judgment, and the Lord's reign. A careful reading of this epistle is essential to a clear understanding of Eschatology. This passage reveals that the church will have been revealed before the rise of the Antichrist.

EVERY SO-CALLED GOD. The NRSV follows the NAS which implies that the man of lawlessness opposes and exalts himself above all false gods (see 1 Cor. 8:5). The NKJV renders it "who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped" (as does the NIV). This translation shows that the lawless one in this passage opposes and exalts himself above not only false gods, but he especially opposes the true God.

SO THAT. The lawless one "...takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." This result clause concludes the verse. As an expression of self-deification, the son of lawlessness will assume the place and claim the name of God. He sets himself up in the temple of God. The word translated temple (*naon*) was a common word which could denote any temple (in a general sense, as in Acts 17:24), or it may be used of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem (Matt. 26:61; Luke 1:9). It could also be used in the strict sense of "sanctuary," denoting the high holy place in which the very presence of God resides either in an earthly temple (cf. Acts 19:24; Matt. 23:35) or in the heavenly sanctuary (Rev. 14:15). One writer notes that "Paul commonly used *naon* metaphorically of the believer as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16). But here it must be used literally if the passage is to depict an observable, symbolic event the church could recognize as an indication of the nearness of the day of the Lord."^{xliv} This gives rise to another question. If this happens during the Tribulation and the church has been raptured before the Tribulation, how will it recognize it? I often have more questions than answers!

It is interesting to compare commentaries:

Pretending to be God, the antichrist will desecrate a rebuilt Jewish temple by setting up an image of himself in the temple and then demanding to be worshiped as God. This is what is otherwise known in Scripture as the abomination that causes desolation (see Dan. 9:26, 27; 11:31; 12:11; Matt. 24:15). This act of desecration will take place halfway through the seventieth prophetic week of Daniel 9:24-27, when the covenant made earlier with the Jewish people is broken (Thomas).^{xlv}

This probably refers to a literal temple, but some suggest that it is a figurative reference to his occupying the most holy place in human worship, which rightfully belongs only to God. The early church fathers and several good modern-day commentators accept the literal view. This man is also called the "beast coming out of the sea" (Rev. 13:1-10), "a scarlet beast" (17:3), and simply "the beast" (17:8, 16; 19:19-20; 20:10). He is the Antichrist (1 John 2:18), a pseudo-Christ hostile to the Savior. He will be a real human being, not a principle or a system or a succession of individuals. Such a person has not yet been spotlighted on the stage of human

history.^{xlvi}

At the midpoint of the tribulation period the Antichrist will desecrate the rebuilt Jewish Temple in Jerusalem by placing himself there to be worshiped. See note on Matt. 24:15. This will be the climax of man's great sin of self-deification, in open defiance of God.^{xlvii}

Obviously, post-tribulation advocates and pre-tribulation adherents will disagree on the various aspects, but no one can deny the evil and arrogance associated with the man of lawlessness. LaHaye and Jenkins have tried to capture the terrifying actions and character of the antichrist in the *Left Behind* series. Their work is fiction, but they succeed in portraying him in his extreme arrogance as he wages war on all that is of God.

D. Its Relation to the Restrainer, 2:5-9.

2:5 - DO YOU NOT REMEMBER. Is Paul rebuking the Thessalonian saints here, or just calling to their memory that fact this was not the first time they had heard this? He asks, “*Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?*” “Paul spoke of Christ’s coming when he was with the Thessalonians; he must have provided them with similar details about the events preceding Christ’s coming.”^{xlviii} This teaching was not new to these people. Paul had taught them about the day of the Lord when he was with them in Thessalonica - and by means of the first epistle - and they should have remembered what he had taught them - and they probably would have if false teachers had not misled them. Now he called on them to recall those lessons.

For the first time in this epistle Paul wrote that he personally (sing.) had taught them. He said this in order to emphasize the truth of his message, as he was the chief spokesman in Thessalonica. Paul did not regard prophetic truth as too deep or unimportant or controversial for new Christians. He believed it was a vital part of the whole counsel of God, so he taught it without hesitation or apology.^{xliv}

2:6 - AND. The “and” connects what Paul has already said with that which follows. He continues with the same subject, but the emphasis shifts to whatever it is that is presently restraining the revelation of the man of sin. “Paul said the Thessalonians knew what it was, but he did not identify it here. Perhaps he had told them in person. Something or Someone is holding back the culmination of lawlessness. Part of the purpose of this restraint is to keep the man of sin from being revealed prematurely.”¹

YOU KNOW. What did they know? They know “*what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed.*” Paul writes that they knew what it was; but since he did not identify it here, we do not know. “Some scholars have said that it could be a veiled reference to the Roman Empire, or the Jewish state, or some great force in the struggle between good and evil that keeps back the antichrist until his time comes. Other scholars have said that this great power must be God, or more

specifically, the Holy Spirit.”^{li} The Holy Spirit, Who indwells the body of Christ (the church), is the force that keeps the full force of the lawless one in check (“restrains him now”). But once the church is removed from this earth (at the Rapture), that restraining power will no longer be present to restrain the lawless one. At that time he will be revealed.

The Spirit’s “function of restraining evil through the body of Christ (John 16:7-11; 1 John 4:4) will cease similar to the way he terminated his striving in the days of Noah (Gen. 6:3). At that point the reins will be removed from lawlessness and the satanically inspired rebellion will begin” (Thomas).^{lii}

Here the word “what,” used of the restrainer is neuter; but in verse 7 the restrainer is masculine. “The neuter would not eliminate the Spirit, which is a neuter word.”^{liii}

2:7 - THE MYSTERY. “*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.*” In the New Testament, a “mystery” is a simply a new truth previously unknown before its revelation in the present dispensation. In this case the mystery is the revelation of a future removal of the restraint of lawlessness in the world. A “mystery” is a secret which God has revealed, or will reveal - one which lies beyond human knowledge. When we see evil at work all around us how can we say that lawlessness is a mystery? Evil is indeed going on all around us, but the at the present time the full manifestation of it is hidden from us. Furthermore, the significance of it would have been hidden from us if we did not have this Scripture.

OF LAWLESSNESS. What, specifically is presently at work, a “mystery,” or “lawlessness?” Paul says “*the mystery of lawlessness is at work.*” The mystery of lawlessness is one of the mysteries of the New Testament (Rom. 16:26; 1 Cor. 2:6-12; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-5; Col. 1:25-27). Lawlessness, to a certain degree, remains a mystery to even the most enlightened among us, including those who hold degrees in the social sciences.

Following a series of mass murders in America, including the killing of students in Mississippi, Colorado, Texas, and other states, experts appeared on television with their answers. From the president, to the vice president, to Attorney General Janet Reno, to the news and entertainment media, the cry was raised, “We have to get guns out of the hands of the wrong people.” However, all the laws enacted so far have only placed restriction on law-abiding citizens. The “wrong hands” know how to get around the law. Furthermore, while the president was decrying guns he released a group of violent terrorists who were serving time from a host of gun violations.

Is there a common denominator in all these shootings? In Pearl Mississippi and at Columbine High School in Colorado there was a common element the media seemed to ignore. That element was the influence of the occult on those who committed the acts of lawlessness. The man who killed the three seminary students and other young people in the Fort Worth Church before taking his own life was reportedly screaming profanity against God while he was shooting His children. Is it not possible that this man was possessed, obsessed, or at least strongly influenced by

Satan, the bitter enemy of God? As I asked in a study I wrote on the Gospel According to Luke (The Bible Notebook), “where have all the demons gone?” These horrible acts of lawlessness may provide us with a clue. If so, it is little wonder that most of those in the media, politics, higher education, and entertainment are clueless.

The debate rages on about the death penalty, abortion, pornography, drive-by shootings, and numerous other acts of lawlessness. The more laws we pass the worse the situation becomes. Why? We entered the post-Christian period in our history in 1935 (according to Shaeffer) - possibly after the Second World War in the Bible Belt - and we are paying the price. We are going to keep on paying the price unless we return to the roots of law and order in America - the Scripture, the foundation of our Constitution.

Certain countries will know greater peace than others, but at the time extreme lawlessness in only being restrained. When the restraints are removed lawlessness will be rampant, irrepressible, and uncontrollable.

HE WHO NOW RESTRAINS. Just as it was in Paul’s day, there is today a lawless movement or force, directed by Satan, which has set itself against God and His church. The lawless one is now being held back by a restrainer. Some understand this to be God indwelling His church by the Holy Spirit, while others see organized human governments as the restraint (law and order). If the restraint is human government, “the removal will be at the rapture of the church (1 Thess. 4:13-18) but, according to the latter, at the overthrow of human government by Antichrist.”^{liv}

This is not an easy subject to understand, and while many commentators seem to be in the same ball park, the differences are interesting. The following quotes will illustrate this The first is from the Bible Knowledge Commentary:

Who or what is restraining the satanically empowered movement against God’s law and is postponing the revelation of the man of sin? Some say it is the Roman Empire. But the empire has long vanished and “the holder back” is not yet revealed. Another suggestion is that this is Satan, but it is difficult to see why he would hold back sin. Others suggest that human governments are holding back sin and the revealing of the Antichrist. But human governments will not end prior to the Antichrist’s unveiling. Nor do all governments restrain sin; many encourage it!^{lv}

The New Commentary on the Whole Bible:

“When the church leaves the earth in the rapture, the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the way in the sense that His unique lawless-restraining ministry through God’s people will be removed . . . ” (Constable).^{lvi}

The Believer’s Study Bible:

“Restrains” emphasizes what is presently a strong effort by the Holy Spirit to hold

back the maximal exhibition of evil and the advent of the Antichrist. In the present age the Spirit is operative in restraining evil. During the Tribulation, the Holy Spirit's ministry of restraining will be moved out of the way, probably as a result of the rapture of the church. This is not a departure of the Holy Spirit, for He is omnipresent, but rather it is a temporary cessation of one of His gracious ministries.^{lvii}

Who or what is restraining the man of lawlessness in the world today? The Holy Spirit is the only One with sufficient power to restrain evil. Evil is rampant in our world today, but according to this it could be a lot worse, and when this special ministry of the Holy Spirit is removed, Satan will unleash evil in unrestrained torrents. We have witnessed what happens when evil is unrestrained to some measure. Nazism killed fifteen million Christians, Jews, and others; Communist governments have slain several times that many under some of the most ungodly regimes in history. One can hardly imagine what will happen when the restraints are totally removed.

2:8 - THEN THAT LAWLESS ONE WILL BE REVEALED. At the appointed time “*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...*” At the time of the removal of restraint that presently holds the lawless one back (vs. 7), the world will be catapulted into lawlessness and the man of sin will be revealed. Though this man’s name is never given in the Bible, he will be known by his actions. He is the same person referred to in verse 3 (see also, Daniel 9:26-27 and 11:36-12:1). Paul’s point is that:

- (1) The Day of the Lord will not begin until the Antichrist is revealed (v. 3).
- (2) The lawless one cannot fully launch his evil campaign until the restrainer is removed (v. 7).
- (3) Since the restrainer has not yet been removed, these Thessalonian saints could be certain that the Day of the Lord had not yet begun, regardless of what the false teachers were saying.

WHOM THE LORD WILL SLAY. This lawless one will oppose all worship and exalts himself above God, but the Lord will slay him “with the breath of His mouth.” As one writer expresses it, the antichrist “may control mankind, but he will be no match for Messiah. Jesus is Lord indeed. ‘The very breathing of the glorified Jesus will slay the lawless one like the blast of a fiery furnace.’^{lviii} He will be killed and his work will be destroyed. “The shining forth of Christ’s presence when He comes to earth will immobilize the Antichrist’s program as certainly as the revelation of the glorified Christ on the Damascus Road stopped Saul in his tracks and terminated his program of fighting against God.”^{lix}

Paul uses three different words in this epistle to in reference to the return of Christ: “revelation” (*apokalupsis*, denoting an “unveiling”), “appearance” (*epiphaneia*, implying the idea of “manifestation”), and “coming” (*parousia*, affirming that Jesus will be alongside His people). All three words are used of Jesus’ coming in power to deal with evil at the close of the Tribulation. The Lord reveals (*apokalupsis*) the evil world dictator for what he really is. “His destruction is accomplished by the display of the Lord's glory (*epiphaneia*) as a result of His personal presence (*parousia*). The result of this great display of divine prerogatives is the destruction of the kingdom

of Satan.”^{lx}

Since the lawless one is so powerful and fearsome, it is of great encouragement to know that the Lord can, and will destroy him “with the breath of His mouth.” The outcome of the battle will never be in doubt. One might wonder why it is that Satan, who so freely quoted Scripture to Jesus, is not forewarned of his coming defeat. Since his destruction is spelled out so clearly, why does he not alter his plans? Possibly it is like the story of the rattlesnake that begged the turtle to give him a ride across a great river. The turtle refused, saying “I am afraid you will bite me and I will die.” The rattlesnake, replied, “No, it would be suicide for me to bite you, because if I bit you and you died, I would drown.” So the turtle finally relented and permitted the rattlesnake to coil on his back just as he was about to enter the water. Half-way across the river the rattlesnake sank his fangs into the neck of the turtle. The horrified turtle cried out, “Why did you do that? Don’t you know I will die and if I die, you will die?” The rattlesnake responded philosophically, “I know, I know. But I couldn’t go against my nature.”

2:9 - IN ACCORD WITH THE ACTIVITY OF SATAN. *“That is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders...”* The one who is coming is the lawless one, whose work is described in more detail in verses 9-12. His work will be empowered by Satan (Rev. 13:2b) and his activities characterized by Satan’s methods. A favorite method of operation for Satan is counterfeiting. He seeks to counterfeit any and every thing God does, including miracles and signs. The lawless one will come in the power of Satan, and he will carry out Satan’s plans. “His power, his life force, comes from Satan. As Christ is to God, so the antichrist is to Satan, his visible embodiment and manifestation.”^{lxi}

I asked a number of friends by e-mail to help me with a list of things that God might have used to advance His kingdom - things that were serving His purpose until they were hijacked by Satan. The list is growing. It includes education in America (hijacked by those who deny our godly heritage), the Constitution (which is being rewritten by the Supreme Court on the basis that it is “a living document”), and the Doctrine of Creation (hijacked by evolutionists). We might include the hijacking of the entertainment industry by Satan - just think of all the good that could be done through television, movies, and music. Films about Jesus have been instrumental in reaching thousands for Christ in Third World countries. Christian counseling was hijacked by the occultist Freud. Think how many of the great old schools like Harvard were founded on Christian principles with an eye on preparing young men for the ministry. Sound Doctrine has been hijacked by liberal, socialists, and revisionists.

Satan played his favorite card when, over the course of the Twentieth Century, he and his forces moved America into the post-Christian era in our history around the time of the Second World War. By the sixties, atheistic evolutionary humanists were assaulting Christian values, standards, ethics, and institutions with a vengeance. When atheistic humanism met with resistance, Satan was ready with New Age religions. The humanist said, “There is no God.” The New Ager (postmodernist) responded, “Of course there is a god. In fact there are many gods. You have your god and I have mine. If yours works for you and mine works for me, we should both be happy. We are all interested in the same thing, we are just going about it in different ways.”

Who would fall for such a lie? Millions. Who would embrace it and teach it? Only recently, Tony Campolo, one of America's favorite socio-theologians, held out the possibility of people going to heaven in some way other than through Jesus Christ. The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention has announced that they are withdrawing support from an Asian seminary because of their affiliation with a school whose president believes there are other ways to a relationship with God than through Jesus Christ.

Satan often strikes with a one-two punch. First, he says, "There is no God." When people object, he they says, "Well everyone knows there is a god, but

- (1) He cannot be known by human beings.
- (2) He is not interested in our little problems.
- (3) How do you know which is the right god.
- (4) What's the hurry?

POWER AND SIGNS AND FALSE WONDERS. In Matthew 24:24, Jesus reveals to us that the miracles would be real, though demoniac, like the mysterious powers of the Egyptian sorcerers. "They would not be like the ones Christ performed, in character, power, or purpose. The Antichrist will attempt to imitate Christ's works as a proof of divinity. But no matter how dramatic a copy he might make, it will be a flawed forgery."^{lxii}

Paul employed three terms to describe the supernatural power this man will demonstrate. First the word "miracles" (*dynamei*) emphasizes the inherent power behind the works he will perform. Second, "signs" (*seōmeiois*) means that they (the miracles) will have significance. Third, "wonders" (*terasín*) point to the attitude of awe that these miracles will evoke when people behold them. The Antichrist will perform such powerful "signs and false wonders" that it will be evident to all that he has supernatural power, and people will stand in awe of him (see Rev. 13:2b-4 and 17:8").

God does not have a monopoly on miracles. There are two supernatural forces at work in the universe; God, Who is unlimited; and Satan, who is limited. Satan can enable his followers to perform deceptive signs and wonders. Anything God does Satan will counterfeit. This will be especially so in the last days. There will be counterfeit "powers (miracles), signs, and wonders" performed by Satan. "From the time of the magicians in Pharaoh's court, through the ministry of the early church, Satan's servants deceived the people with their sleight-of-hand magic tricks. Satan remains in the deception business. We must beware his powers. God's miracles point us to love. Thus we can recognize them."^{lxiii}

E. Its Relation to Unbelievers, 2:10-12.

2:10 - DECEPTION. "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." Who are those who under the "deception of wickedness? And how are they deceived by the lawlessness one? Through his power, signs and false wonders" (vs. 9). The same three words used to describe his miracles in verse 9 were

used of the miracles of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22) and the apostles (Heb. 2:4). It will appear to unbelievers living on the earth at that time that the lawless one is indeed God. He will be able to pass himself off as the supreme God and will be worshiped as God.

His miracles are not the only thing that will deceive people into thinking he has divine power. Everything he does will mislead people, especially those whose minds are blinded to the truth of who he is and what he is doing because they do not believe God's Word. The meaning of this verse is not that everything he does will be perceived as **evil** by people, but that it will be evil in its essence because it misrepresents **the truth** and leads people away from worshiping God.^{lxiv}

All who reject the love of God do so under the "deception of wickedness." Deceived by Satan, they reject God's great salvation, and rejecting His love they perish. Individuals are free to accept or reject God's salvation. As the late Dr. R. Pinson, my faculty advisor at Mississippi College and one of my all time favorite professors, used to tell his classes, "Everyone is free to chose, but no one is free not to chose." God takes the initiative in choosing His people, but each "chosen" person must chose to accept Jesus Christ. He is The Way, the Truth, and the Life and no one will go to Heaven except through Him. A lot of "nice" people believe we are all going to the same place, but there are a number of ways to get there." That is a lie with the breath of hell still one it!

This passage also refutes the idea that all persons will be finally saved by God whatever they do or believe - or whatever they do not believe or do. People who refuse to accept Christ's truth and God's love face eternal judgment. Christians commit themselves to God's truth and let the Spirit make them holy. However, the "unrighteous decision of rejecting God's truth (v. 10) results in their condemnation (v. 12). A mind committed to unrighteousness will not entertain the truth and therefore will not be saved. It is a mind which is destined to lead one astray (v. 10, 11). A distaste for truth evidences a distaste for God."^{lxv}

"Love of the truth" (love of the Gospel) means acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and absolute obedience to it. "It does not imply a higher requirement than simply believing it. The truth contrasts with the lies of the man of sin. The consequence of believing and loving the truth is salvation."^{lxvi} One's responses to the Gospel must be a matter of the heart (love), rather than simply of the head.

2:11 - A DELUDING INFLUENCE. *"For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false..."* It is getting interesting! God will be the One Who sends "upon them a deluding influence?" That is exactly what we find in Verses 11-12; the deluding influence comes from God. They have rejected God finally and ultimately, and now He is not just permitting the delusion, He is contributing to it, just as He hardened the heart of Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus. It was only after Pharaoh had hardened his own heart against God that God began to cooperate with him in hardening it even more, to the end that Yahweh's power and sovereignty would be manifested through the plagues and the Exodus. In these two verses, God is sending a deluding spirit upon those who have hardened their hearts against the truth as both a punishment for their sin, and a moral result of their rejection of the truth. "These verses reflect the

OT concept that God is sovereign even in the activities of the powers of evil (cf. Ex. 4:21; Josh. 11:20; 1 Kings 22:19-23; 1 Chron. 21:1; cf. 2 Sam. 24:1). The result will be that men will believe what is false, as Satan works through Antichrist.^{lxvii} “Once they have completely refused the truth, God justly lets them go their own way and settle into believing Satan’s great lie (cf. 1 Kings 22:22, 23; Ezek. 14:9; Job 12:16; Matt. 24:5, 11; 1 Tim. 4:1).^{lxviii}

The notes in the Disciple’s Study Bible provide us with a summary:

The one sovereign God controls the fate of all persons. He has allowed evil to exist as a judgment on human sin and a test of human freedom. People who love lawlessness rather than God and follow lies rather than God’s truth have chosen condemnation rather than eternal life. God will allow the man of lawlessness to deceive them and lead them to eternal death. God has chosen to let evil triumph over those who choose evil and reject Him.^{lxix}

2:12 - IN ORDER THAT. This speaks to the reason God had in sending upon them “a deluding influence” (vs. 11) - that “*they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.*” God’s purpose in all of this was to execute justice (1:6) upon those who chose to reject Him and His salvation. Eternal condemnation will be the fate of all who on the one hand choose to disbelieve “the truth” and on the other hand delight “in wickedness.” The opposite of believing the truth is delighting in wickedness; a spiritual decision leads to its moral manifestation. “This consequence befalls everyone who disbelieves the gospel. Paul’s primary concern here is, of course, unbelievers who will be living when the man of sin will be revealed. But these principles of God’s judgment apply in all ages and can be seen in the 20th century.”^{lxx}

This brings some questions to mind. First, does the Scripture teach that those living on the earth who do not believe the Gospel before the man of sin is revealed - those who are not caught up to meet the Lord at the Rapture (thus, still living on the earth) cannot be saved after the man of lawlessness has been revealed? Second, can people who reject the Gospel before the Rapture be saved after the Rapture takes place? One’s answer will depend upon which eschatological view they embrace. Some will say yes, others no. The *Left Behind* series by Jenkins and LaHaye, a fictionalized presentation of end-time events, takes the position that many will be saved after the Rapture. What do you think? Some students of the Word are not just dogmatic, they are Bull-dogmatic on the subject. All of us would agree on one thing - we would not want to be an unbeliever at the time of the Rapture! The “powerful delusion” (vs. 11) that God will bring on those who are “left behind” suggests that few, if any, then living on the earth will be saved after the Rapture. Many see this as a special judgment from God that will occur at this one time in history.

To put this section (2:1-12) in perspective, Paul reminds his readers that the trials and persecutions they were presently experiencing (1:4) were not an indication that they were suffering the judgments of the day of the Lord. They had not missed the Rapture! Before the judgments of the day of the Lord would come, certain events must occur and those alive at that time can identify them. First, there is the apostasy (turning away from the truth of God). Second, there will be the removal of the Restrainer at the Rapture (the Holy Spirit is restraining evil in the world as He works

through the church He indwells and empowers). Third, there is the unveiling of the man of lawlessness (the antichrist). The Thessalonian believers should be encouraged with these words of hope and assurance because they would know that since these events had not occurred, they were not experiencing the judgments accompanying the day of the Lord. They were suffering, but that was not a part of the end-time judgment of God.

F. Its Relation to Believers, 2:13-17.

2:13 - THANKS TO GOD. Paul follows the warning about judgment with a word of thanksgiving: *“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.”* The reason for the Paul’s joy and gratitude was God’s choice of the Thessalonian believers for eternal salvation. What a contrast there is between the saved and the lost, between those who accept the truth and those who reject it. These saints may have been hated and persecuted by their godless neighbors, but they were loved by God. In John 3:16 we find that God loves the world - He loves all people. But there is more, for Paul was inspired to write in Romans 5:8, *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* He did not wait for human beings to merit His love - which they could never do - before he loved them.

In this verse, Paul addresses these saints as “brethren beloved by the Lord.” Does this indicate that God loves those who accept His Son, Jesus Christ any more than He loves lost people? After all, Jesus did not die to redeem people who were not lost. He poured out His life’s blood for people who are in rebellion against Him. But those who receive Jesus Christ enter a special realm of His love and His glory. They, by the grace of God, enter an intimate relationship with Him and in doing so they become beneficiaries of blessings not known by those outside the family of believers. God becomes their Father and they become His children, and as such they are especially secured in the bonds of His love.

GOD HAS CHOSEN YOU. All believers are Christians because they are chosen of God. Different people explain it differently - some even define the terms differently, but one they know for sure - we do not choose Him, He chooses us. In my study on Ephesians in the Bible Notebook series of Bible studies I share the story of a twenty-two year old man named Tommy who was in the Hinds County Jail in Jackson Mississippi facing murder charges. I visited Tommy one Thursday afternoon and found a reporter from the Clarion Ledger badgering him. The jailer told me the reporter’s time was up, to go on in. I talked with Tommy and another man in a nearby cell. After I left a priest visited Tommy and left some material for him to read, promising to come back in a week and “give him a test on it.” Tommy asked the jailer not to let the priest back in and explained to the other man in maximum security, “I need more than that!” His new friend cautioned him about talking to reporters, “They’ll get you the death penalty.” Then he advised him to talk with me the next week. About two days later I received a letter from Tommy in which he said, “Johnny, I am trying to find God.” I immediately wrote back to tell him that if he was trying to find God, it was because God had found him first! God was revealing to him his need for salvation. God always

takes the initiative. Any god you can “find” is not worth having!

While lying in a bed in the CCU unit of the Glenwood Hospital in West Monroe, Louisiana, I did a lot of praying - and a lot of trusting. Because of His grace there was no fear, and you cannot imagine how much that means unless you have been there. I do not remember the exact date, but I have a clear memory of an impression that became so clear to me that I paused to thank the Lord for the fresh awareness - I did not choose God, He chose me. And it is all of grace; I do not deserve it at all.

The sovereignty of God is manifested in our salvation. I realize there are many people who will use the expression, “the sovereignty of grace,” but I ascribe sovereignty to a Person, not to an emotion, motivation, or a cause.

Salvation has its roots in creation and its goal in Christ's glorious return. The sovereign Creator who chose His people for salvation before creation also determined when Christ would return to earth. The God who made the world knows when to send His Son to transform it and free it from the curse under which it now lies because of sin .^{lxxi}

FROM THE BEGINNING. Does this mean from the beginning of Paul’s work in Thessalonica? Or, from the beginning of their salvation? We find the answer in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians church:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace (Eph. 1:3-7).

So, God chose us “before the Creation of the world.” We read in Romans 8:29-30:

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Every person who is saved was foreknown by God before the foundation of the world? Could that be possible? How could God foreknow us without stripping us of any responsibility in making a personal commitment to Him? We may be certain of this: both the sovereignty of God and human responsibility are Scriptural doctrines. That God could have foreknowledge of me (my salvation) is mind boggling. It boggles my mind! “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound...”

SANCTIFICATION. We were chosen by God “for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.” Ray Wells of the Louisiana Baptist Convention and I have corresponded via e-mail concerning a subject I mentioned to a number of people - “Hijacked by Satan.” He made a number of contributions to my list. Churches have been hijacked by Satan, as have governments, institutions, and services. Sanctification is a doctrine that Satan has sought to hijack and his method has been twofold, misinformation and counterfeiting. He has been so effective that many mainline denominations seem to avoid placing much emphasis on this vital doctrine.

What exactly is Sanctification? We know that Justification is all of God - by grace through faith. Many do not seem to understand that Sanctification is also all of God - by grace through faith. Justification (a metaphor of the courtroom, declaring the individual just in the sight of the law) is once-for-all. Sanctification is continuous, beginning in Justification when the new believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and set apart for the glory of God. It is not a second blessing as some believe, based in part on the KJV translation of Acts 19:1f.

Let me share some passages that should guide us in understanding what Sanctification is all about, beginning with John, Chapters 14-16 (especially John 16:7-11). Follow that with Romans 8:29 (quoted in full above): “He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.” Sanctification is occurring as we are being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Is it any wonder that Paul would write to the Philippians, “Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus...” When you begin to think like Jesus you begin to act like Jesus. Peter wrote, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18a). That is a great description of Sanctification.

The means God uses to effect our salvation is the work of His Holy Spirit, Who sets aside chosen individuals for lives of holiness and separation from sin (John 16:7-11). Those are the ones who are regenerated and adopted into the family of God. The Holy Spirit regenerates, indwells, and baptizes Christians into the body of Christ. The human aspect of salvation is expressed in the words “faith in the truth.” Sanctification continues as the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to purify the believer’s life (John 17:17). “The Spirit works in the chosen person until he or she believes the truth. This same operation is described in 1 Peter 1:2, in which it is said that the sanctifying Spirit causes the elect to become obedient to Jesus Christ and receive the sprinkling of his cleansing blood.”^{lxxii}

2:14 - HE CALLED. *“It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* God had called these believers in Thessalonica to salvation by using the Gospel as it was proclaimed to them by Paul and his associates. “God’s purpose in doing so was that the believers **might** one day **share** the splendor and honor that **Jesus Christ** now enjoys, seated at the right hand of the Father (1:10-12).”^{lxxiii}

2:15 -STAND FIRM. *“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.”* Because of all that he has written - and all that he had taught them when he was with them - he now urges the saints at Thessalonica to do two things: “stand firm,” and “hold to the traditions” which he had taught them. The former is self-

explanatory, and at the same time something the Lord greatly desires for His children.

The Thessalonians had strayed from what Paul had taught them, “letting themselves be taken in by some dubious revelations and forged letters allegedly from Paul.”^{lxxiv} James wrote the Jews of the Dispersion, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (James 1:2-3). The NIV has “the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” The opposite of “standing firm” (steadfastness) is of course instability. There is a good Old Testament illustration in Jacob’s words to one of his sons who was passed over for his father’s blessing: “Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel...”

Paul’s exhortation needs special attention today. Every Sunday most churches of any size will have three different world views represented in the congregation. (1) There is the traditional world view (made up of members in their early fifties and older); (2) there are Baby Boomers (from the early thirties to the early fifties); and (3) there are the Baby Busters (Generation X - those from eighteen to their early thirties). The traditional group is more conservative in doctrine, dress, and finances. They are also much better grounded in Scripture as a group (there are many exceptions, such as the man who stops growing when he begins leaving spiritual matters to his wife). A larger percentage of this group is more likely to tithe, to attend services Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening, and attend all services when the church is in revival or a Bible conference. They are also much more likely to stay with their church (And their denomination) and not bail out when there are problems. These people are going to attend services and worship without being distracted by physical circumstances. They often prefer to sit near the front in services, open their Bible and follow the preacher. As he preaches, these people are filling in the gaps. They understand the terminology.

One evangelism conference leader observed that Baby Boomers change churches on the average of once every five years, they do not know the Scripture, they may be upwardly mobile people with good jobs and a desire to succeed in business. They are also more likely to be turned off by a less than outstanding sound system, musical instrument, or traditional song service. They, as a rule, would prefer to sit in the back. As a matter of fact there are reports of Baby Boomer families entering the foyer, looking for vacant places on pews in the back, and leaving rather than walk down to the middle of the sanctuary. When Boomers leave a church, they may not have any problem with the pastor or other members. They were invited by friends to another church and liked and stayed. This is something older members find hard to grasp. It would be interesting to know how many pastors have been forced to resign because a number of Baby Boomers left and went to another church. Some could not accept the idea that they would leave if they were satisfied with the pastor.

The third group is a group that follows no rules (there are many exceptions). If the Baby Boomers do not know, the Busters do not care. With little or no background in Christian doctrines, they are open to anything novel. They seem attracted to some of the charismatic type worship service, because having no understanding of the revealed truth in the Word of God, they are easily impressed by “experiences.” They may attend a service and leave praising the preacher, the music, and the friendly people to such a degree that people are sure they will be back the next Sunday.

They may, however, never return.

A mature minister of the Gospel accepted an appointment to a missions position with a major denomination which mandated a move to a new city. He and his family began looking for a church with traditional hymns, expository preaching, and Sunday School classes in which the Bible was seriously taught. After a few weeks, his wife voiced their frustration when she said, “People no longer choose a church based on the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. They choose a church on the basis of the gym or bowling alley.”

Many churches compromise in order to reach people. Some churches go out into the community and ask lost people what they want in a church and go back and adapt their ministry accordingly. In doing so they let the world rather than Jesus control the church. Some justify whatever they do on the basis of the numbers they reach. Success justifies the means. It took Noah one hundred, twenty years to build the ark. How many of the jeering crowd did he reach in those one hundred, twenty years? The same eight people who cut the first boards for the ark were the very people who entered it more than a century later. He must have been the worlds greatest failure if numbers take precedence over everything else. Noah may not have been very successful in terms of numbers, but he was right before God, because he was obedient to God.

Paul pleaded with the believers in Thessalonica to be faithful, to stand firm in the face of the persecution to which they were subjected by their neighbors. The children of God should do what is right in the sight of God and do it consistently, even if they have to pay a price for it.

HOLD TO THE TRADITIONS. The Greek word for “traditions” means “that which is passed on.” The NIV renders it, “the teachings we passed on to you.” These divinely inspired teachings were passed on to the Thessalonians by the words of the apostle, and by the first great epistle. Paul now urges them to hold onto those teachings. “The teacher passes on the traditions of the faith as they relate to the life and teachings of Jesus and to Christian doctrine and practice. This experience gives the church stability so that it will not run adrift from its dogmatic moorings.”^{lxxv}

Good traditions should be handed down from generation to generation, as parents teach their children both by word and deed. They must teach their children the Word of God and demonstrate the practical application of it in their presence. Every family needs to adopt godly traditions. There is always the danger that good traditions may deteriorate into meaningless ritual, or human tradition (the traditions of men; see Mark 7:8; Col 2:8). When this happens, the church ceases to function as a New Testament Church, it loses power, and individual faith is stymied. “To prevent this, traditions must be continuously validated by the Holy Spirit in the life of the church according to the standard of Christ and the gospel. See 1 Co 12:1-3; 14:29; Gal 1:6-9; Col 2:6-8; 2 Th 2:2; 1 Jn 4:1-3.”^{lxxvi}

Christians are in constant danger of being swept downstream by the currents of ungodly culture. They are also prone to let the truths they know and the relationship they enjoy with God grow cold. They need to vigorously **hold to** what they have been taught by God’s servants. The Thessalonians were in danger of loosening their grip on the apostles’ teachings which they had received (cf. 2 Thes. 3:6) in person

from the missionaries and from their letters. They were in danger of slipping backward in their Christian experience because of the pressures of their trials and the daily negative influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil.^{lxxvii}

2:16 - AND NOW. The point has been made very effectively, so at this point the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to add, “*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 comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word*” (Underline words are from verse 17). I have been asked why I stress that the Holy Spirit is the divine Author of all Scripture. The answer to me is very simple - He is! But more to the point, many commentaries discuss at length what Paul (or John, or Peter) was thinking when he wrote a certain passage. I am somewhat chagrined by commentaries that unabashedly proclaim that if Paul was aware of so-and-so, this passage means thus-and-so; but if he was not aware of it, it means so forth and so on. The plain and simple fact is that the Holy Spirit was never limited by what the human author did, or did not know. This, of course, does not mean that the human author was a machine. For example, educational disparities between Paul and the fishermen, John and Peter are very obvious to anyone reading from the Greek New Testament. The message, however, is of divine origin.

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. I love this: “Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God the Father...” In the Model Prayer Jesus taught that we are to pray, “Our Father...” These two words establish two relationships, one vertical and one horizontal. Only those who have been born-again can call the great transcendent God “Father,” but all believers have that privilege. The use of the word “our” means that we recognize that while we are saved individually, one by one, when place our faith in Jesus Christ we are adopted into the family of God. We become brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus is His personal name - Jesus, the Name above every Name. Jesus is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament name Joshua, which means “Jehovah is my salvation.”

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, **God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW**, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:8-11, CAPS in NAS, bold added for emphasis).

Christ is His title, identifying Jesus as the Anointed One, the Messiah. He is the Seed of Abraham, the Son of David, the Righteous Branch, the Prince of Peace, the Suffering Servant, the Stone upon whom all eyes will be focused. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth, the preeminent High Priest of Hebrews, the Son of God.

At the outset of the new Third Millennium A. D. we must be careful to point out to people that Jesus is the Christ. Why? Have not all Americans always known that? Until the last quarter of

the Twentieth Century most Americans did. When America was still basically a Christian nation - at least we enjoyed a Christian culture - anyone who talked about Jesus was talking about the true Christ, the Son of God. While there is some overlapping, as we passed from a theistic society to a humanistic society, both words, Jesus and Christ fell into disfavor. When did that happen? Here is an easy test. Do you remember when the TV sit-coms dropped the name of Jesus in their Christmas episodes? That should have signaled us that something was amiss. It meant that among the elite who make and break politicians, the news and entertainment media and the liberal elite who impose their powerful influence on entertainment, education and the environment, there was a distinct anti-Christian bias. This bias has been progressively revealed.

The Humanists declared, "There is not God," or "God is Dead." These people did not believe in God, so we should not be surprised that they did not believe in Jesus Christ. Humanists loudly declared their plans to rid America of the "dying carcass of Christianity." Most people were not deceived by the Humanists, in fact they resisted them. But the last quarter of the Twentieth Century brought about a subtle, devious change. Even before we began hearing the term "New Age," the philosophy was permeating the very fabric of our society. Suddenly, there were a lot of people out there refuting the Humanists. They scoffed when the Humanists said that there is no God. They were so passionate and so clever that many Christians were deceived. These people not only believed in God, they proclaimed their belief in Jesus. They actually talked about Christ. But before evangelicals discovered what these people were all about, they had deceived millions. They helped turn the tide against Humanism, but while we were still focused on the turning of the tide, they were supplanted Humanism with a religious philosophy that is much more difficult to refute.

For those who really know the Word of God, New Age (postmodern) religious views are as wrong as, and more dangerous than Humanism. The problem is not just in the arena of truth, but also in the perception. Humanists shocked many people into resisting them. New Agers offered so many different areas of compromise that masses of people without a Scriptural foundation offered little resistance. Yet, these people are as deeply opposed to the true Christ as the Humanists. Media mogul Ted Turner, has called Christianity a religion for losers. A major television producer declared that Christianity had failed America, so now he is going to give America his religion. One news agency has revealed that it is now their policy not to use the words "Jesus" and "Christ" together because that would be expressing an opinion.

Satan is not disturbed by counterfeit Christs, he is the counterfeiter. We must be very careful to be sure that the Jesus we are talking about is the Jesus of the Bible. The Jesus of the cults is not the Jesus of Scripture. One New Ager said while channeling his spirit-guide, "When you look for the Christ in you, you discover that you are Christ."

ETERNAL COMFORT. The Thessalonian saints needed comfort and encouragement in light of their recent anxiety created by false teachings concerning the day of the Lord. God, by His grace provides eternal comfort to His children who follow the Holy Spirit in the study of Scripture and in the application of it in life situations.

2:17 - STRENGTHEN. *"Comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word."*

They needed comfort and they needed to be strengthened. If you comfort one in his weakness and he remains weak he will soon need comforting again. Verses 16-17 form a prayer and a blessing. “Prayer can speak a blessing. Blessing includes the power to act right for God as well as daily physical needs. The eternal encouragement came by the initiative of God. Paul prayed for the continuation of what God initiated.”^{lxxviii}

The following statement from Wiersbe provides us with a summary for this section:

Paul makes a wonderful application: stand fast! Don’t be moved by world convulsions, political upheavals, or religious apostasy. All these things must take place, but God is still on the throne. As the end of the age draws near, it will be more and more difficult to live for Christ and serve Him. What should the Christian do? Hold on to the Word of God! Don’t listen to the lies of the devil—the teachings of the cults, the sugar-coated promises of false teachers. Hold to the Word of God! We have in Christ and His Word eternal encouragement and good hope.

We must keep on working. “Every good word and work” (v. 17) is a good motto to follow in these dark days. Keep on giving out the Word; keep on working for Christ. As we win others to Christ, we are building up the body. When the body is completed, it will be caught away to glory. This is what Peter means by “hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:11-12). As long as the church is in the world, Satan’s program of wickedness is held back; but once the church is gone, Satan will have more freedom. He will seek to destroy Israel and ruin mankind. These are great and challenging days. May we be found faithful when He comes!^{lxxix}

IV. EXHORTATIONS TO PRAYER AND DISCIPLINE, 3:1-15.

A. Paul’s Confidence in the Thessalonians, 3:1-5.

The second coming of Christ is more than a doctrine for the classroom; it is a truth to direct our lives and make us stronger servants of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, some of the believers at Thessalonica were abusing the doctrine of Christ’s return. In this final chapter, Paul exhorts them to amend their ways. It is not enough to know about the Second Coming of our Lord, we must let it help form our world view. Our attitude toward the return of our Lord will influence not only our world view, but daily decisions.

This may be a good place to add a discordant note. In a conversation with some friends, I once made the statement that while I subscribe to the basic tenets of premillennialism, some of the biggest nuts I have ever known were Premillennialists. They all agreed with me. When we hear specific predictions concerning the time of our Lord’s return, it may be a good idea to remind ourselves that everyone who has made such predictions in the past has been wrong. Does 1919 ring a bell? The Jehovah’s Witnesses had to rewrite their calendar after that date.

Some time back I received a book and a magazine subscription from a Messianic Jewish organization in which the writers militantly advanced a particular view with reference to the Tribulation. Letters to the editor identified various staff members who were at odds with their pastor because they had been persuaded to accept the view of the publisher. Here is a rule of thumb in discussions about Eschatology: always monitor your conversations to be sure you are throwing more light than heat on the subject, and at all times remember the Second Great Commandment. Never beat your neighbor over the head with Scripture. Pray that the Holy Spirit will bring us together in the Truth. The Holy Spirit is the divine Author of Scripture, He has miraculously preserved it, and He illuminates our hearts and our minds so that we can understand it. As I asked in the study of the first epistle, wouldn't it be wonderful if the Holy Spirit led us all to the same conclusion on this subject!

3:1 - FINALLY. *“Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you...”* With the word “finally” Paul is not concluding the epistle, but introducing the last major part of the letter.

PRAY FOR US. Paul makes a request - “pray for us.” The Thessalonians needed prayer and Paul was praying for them, but Paul and his fellow missionaries also needed prayer and now he is requesting their prayer. Not only do we see a request for prayer, there is also confidence in the power of prayer. I have often heard foreign missionaries say, “We appreciate your offerings, but what we need most is your prayers.” In the monthly journal published by the International Mission Board, *Commission*, there is an article about a church in South Carolina that has adopted a missionary in a particular area of Ghana. Hundreds of people are praying on a regular basis for the missionary and for the people to whom he is ministering. The missionary says that missionaries often get the feeling that while the people back home are sending money, they forget to pray for them. Perhaps the main reason many get the feeling that no one is praying for them is that no one is praying for them! The missionary insists that they have begun to see some miraculous things take place since this church began praying for them.

Not only did the believers at Thessalonica face temptations, they also faced suffering and persecution for the cause of Christ. Paul was praying for them, but Paul also needed their prayers. They also needed to pray for one another. Paul requested prayer for two matters. First, he acknowledged that the success of their missionary work was due to God's blessing His Word as they proclaimed it through their preaching and teaching (see Is. 55:11). Furthermore, the success of missions and evangelism depended upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit in preparing hearts of those who heard the Gospel. “The Thessalonians knew from their experiences how God works in people's hearts to prepare them to receive the gospel; so they could pray with conviction that God would honor His Word by causing others who heard it to believe it.”^{lxxx}

I have forgotten the occasion, but once when I had said or done something in a humorous spirit, a friend declared, “I am going to pray for you.” I responded, “Please do. I know I need the prayer and I am sure you can use the practice!” Assuming a burden of prayer for others, however, is no joking matter. When we make a commitment to pray for others, we must be prepared to pay the

price, in both time and energy. Intercessory prayer is hard work, and as such it is not work for those who are easily discouraged, or those who always start something with great enthusiasm, but before long they begin to fizzle out - when faith fizzles, the commitment to pray for others will soon fizzle with it.

When, more than a thousand years before Christ, the ancient Israelites demanded a king, they were in effect rejecting God as their King and Samuel as their prophet. Still, they pressed Samuel to anoint a king to reign over them, and the Lord told Samuel to grant their request. Fearing the judgment of God for their sins, they asked Samuel to pray for them.

Then all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil by asking for ourselves a king." Samuel said to the people, "Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. "You must not turn aside, for then you would go after futile things which can not profit or deliver, because they are futile. "For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself. **"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you;** but I will instruct you in the good and right way. "Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. "But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away" (1 Sam. 12:19-25, emphasis added).

For us today, it is still a sin to neglect to pray for those who need our prayer. This is especially true when someone requests prayer and we make a commitment to pray for them. Bob Moore was one of our deacons at Hillcrest Baptist Church, Nederland, Texas. Bob also served as the Director for the Youth Department in Sunday School. One Sunday he told me that a young lady named Kay had given her testimony in the youth department and added, "I would like to bring her to your study next Sunday morning and get her to share with you the story of her conversion." I looked forward to it all week, based on what Bob had told me. I was not disappointed! You could hear the faith in her voice and see it in her eyes. I soon learned that when people had a problem they wanted Kay to pray for them.

A few months later Kay stopped by to tell me something that had happened. She had been at home when a neighbor came running up to her door and began knocking. When she went to the door her friend began pouring out her heart to her. Her little boy had become ill and they had rushed him to the hospital, where doctors offered a diagnoses and then told her that he had no chance to live. She was begging Kay to pray for her child. Kay said, "I told her I would pray for her little boy and I did, but based on what she had said I really did not believe there was any hope for him. She said I prayed, asking the Lord to heal him if it was His will, never believing that He would do it. I just asked the Lord to help his family to deal with his death when the time came." A few days later Kay saw her neighbor running toward her house met her at the door. "God has healed him!" she exclaimed, "God has healed him. Thank you for praying for him." Kay said that she was crushed

with guilt because even as she prayed she did not expect God to heal the little boy.” She felt that she has failed the neighbor and her little boy - and she had failed God. Indeed she had failed - both her neighbor and her Lord. She understood that praying without faith is sin. I have been guilty on too many occasions to ever condemn Kay. When we fail to pray for one another it is a sin and we need to repent. When the Israelites asked Samuel to pray for them he responded, “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way” (1 Sam. 12:23).

The other side of intercessory prayer is the blessings it brings to the one doing the praying. When you pray for other believers both our relationship with the other person, and our relationship with God will be greatly enhanced. As I write this, I am thinking about a prayer request my son John made yesterday (Sunday) morning. He asked me to put Bert Morales on our prayer list. Bert had been taken to a Shreveport hospital where they found a “mass” on his brain. John is an Assistant District Attorney in Ouachita Parish and a former City Prosecutor for the city of Monroe, Louisiana, and in that capacity he has cultivated the friendship of many people in the law enforcement community. Bert and a group from his shift usually ate lunch together and John had joined them on a number of occasions.

When John asked that we have pray for Bert in our services he also asked for prayer for his family. Today at noon, he called to tell me that Bert had died. He said, “His family is really going to need your prayer. He left a little nine year old girl.”

During the Sunday School hour, only minutes after John’s prayer request, I received a phone call from a lady I have known for years. Her brother-in-law had suffered a heart attack and she was deeply concerned for him, but she also has a burden for her husband. The day before, my younger son Mark and I had stopped by to visit her husband at work. Before I left I had talked with him about his need to receive Jesus Christ. He had not mentioned that to his wife, but when she told him he should call me, he said, “Yeah - he came by yesterday.” I told this godly lady that I am concerned about her brother-in-law , but if anything, I am more concerned about her husband. His brother has a heart problem, but, I added, “your husband’s is a more serious heart problem,” She has prayed for him for years and I trust that she will never stop. Intercessory payer is an awesome responsibility, but it can also bring the greatest joy any Christian can imagine.

THAT THE WORD. There are general prayer requests - “Remember us in your prayers;” and there are specific prayer requests - “Please pray for my son’s salvation.” Three of Paul’s requests were concerned the proclamation of the Gospel (Eph 6:19; Col 4:3), two of them were for help in danger (Rom. 15:31; 1 Th 5:25). In this prayer there are two specific requests, one in this verse: “Pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you;” and one in verse 2.

3:2 - RESCUED. “...*And that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.*” God had delivered Paul and his associates from “perverse and evil men,” and he would need to be rescuing many times before his eventual martyrdom Those “who did not believe the truth” (2:10-12), both Jews and Gentiles, whom Paul encountered in virtually every city he visited. The

Jews at Thessalonica were especially hostile, first forcing him to leave Thessalonica and go to Berea, and then following him to Berea where they stirred up so much trouble that he had to leave and go to Athens (Acts 17:5-10). From Athens he went to Corinth where he would be joined by Silas and Timothy (he wrote this letter from Corinth). See Acts 18:6-17 for the account.

Verses 1 shows the positive side of the preaching of the Gospel and verse 2 reveals the negative side. The salvation of lost people is the positive side and the persecution of the messenger is the negative side. God will protect His children from “the evil one” (3:3), and He will protect them from “perverse and evil” people who, in the character of their evil master, oppress and persecute them. God will protect the faithful from both sources of evil - Satan and evil people who would seduce them to follow the devil.

3:3 - THE LORD IS FAITHFUL. *“But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.”* This is not just wishful thinking. Paul has absolute confidence in His Lord. The nature and character of God is the only true basis for the Christian’s confidence and hope. Because God has promised to supply believers’ needs, “Paul could rest in the assurance that He would provide strength (cf. 1 Thes. 3:2, 13; 2 Thes. 2:17) to withstand temptation and trials, and protection from the adversary and his emissaries (cf. Phil. 1:6; 1 Thes. 5:24).”^{lxxxi}

THE EVIL ONE. The evil one is Satan, the devil, the bitter enemy of God and all that is holy. He is the enemy of every human being because we are created in the image of God and because we are the object of His love. The devil is the one behind the persecution of those who proclaim the Gospel. If Satan was not afraid to come into the presence of Jesus when He was in the wilderness to tempt Him, he certainly will not be afraid to tempt us. We are assured of victory against Satan and his forces, but only in the Lord. James wrote, “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Paul’s confidence was based on the faithfulness of God, not the strength or character of the Thessalonians. The inspired Scripture promises us He is faithful. If we want to understand more about our God we must study His attributes. God is love; God is omniscient; God is omnipotent; God is omnipresent; God is good - we could go on and on. God is also faithful. Without His faithfulness there would be no hope.

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:9).

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it 1 Cor. 10:13).

Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass (1Thess. 5:24).

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right (1 Peter 4:19).

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Jesus' promise to be with us, and God's promise to protect us should give us assurance that He will provide strength for spiritual warfare against Satan (cf. 1 Thes. 3:2, 13; 2 Thes. 2:17). He will give us the victory over temptations and trials, and He will protect us from the adversary (Satan) and his emissaries (demons) (Phil. 1:6; 1 Thes. 5:24).

3:4 - CONFIDENCE. *"We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command."* In 3:1, we have the request, "brethren, pray for us" and a specific object of the prayer request, "that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified." In verse 2, we have the reason for the prayer request, "that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men." In verse 3, there is an expression of confidence, based on the fact that "...the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one." The Lord had protected Paul and his associates, and he was protecting the Thessalonian believers. Now in 3:4, we see another reason for confidence - that they would continue to obey the instructions Paul, Silas, and Timothy had given them in person, and that they would "continue to do what we command" in this second inspired letter.

There is a very important point here. It is so basic that it should not have to be repeated to a mature Christian, yet one so critical that each believer needs to be reminded each day. Paul and his friends are not expressing this great confidence in what the Thessalonians would be doing for God, but upon what He would be doing **in** them, **through** them, and **for** them. In other words, the missionaries "were not relying on their readers' inherent power to do what was right; their confidence was that since the believers were in Christ, the Lord would work in them to react favorably to this epistle."^{lxxxii}

It is disturbing to think how much of the work of the average church might well be a matter of what the people are doing for God, and not what God is doing with, through, for, and in them. Does that sound trite, or even redundant? Too often a modern church hears of a new program or ministry in some other place, send some one off to learn what they are doing, and then let them teach the church how some other churches found a way to count more nickels and noses. Then, they ask God to bless what they are doing for Him.. If they began by asking God to give them His program and His ministry, He would most definitely bless it.

There are some great programs and outstanding ministries from which the local church could learn and prosper in the Lord. When people from various churches come together to learn a new method of evangelism and return and teach their local church the program, they may go out and reach a lot of people for the Lord. Since there have been many evangelism programs that have been successful, it is possible that what was most important was the fresh motivation to go out and witness to lost people for Jesus Christ. Each church must decide on an outreach program - to fail to

plan is to plan to fail! But I would venture to say that if the evangelism department of each state convention in the Southern Baptist Convention would take the old Gospel leaflet, “What Saith the Scripture?” and bring together church leaders and present it as a new approach to soul-winning, and get them to go back and present it to their churches, thousands of people would be led to faith in Jesus Christ. I have used that tract since I was a student at Mississippi College (1955-59). I used it in the Hinds County Jail and in the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman; I have used it in my study and in homes. I recently condensed it under the title “Do You Want to Go to Heaven?”, and printed it on red, yellow and gray paper for our people to use.

I also use the Roman Road approach in witnessing to lost people. There are many other programs that God has blessed, but the point here is that we are dealing with an implementation of the Great Commission that is Scriptural, and if we consistently get God’s Word into the hearts and minds of lost people we are going to see many of them saved.

That which really concerns me is the tendency of so many people to look around and see who is reporting the fastest growth and then jumping onto the bandwagon. A number of years ago church leaders were bringing Paul Yongi Cho from Korea to teach them how to reach a lot of lost people and grow a big church. Many did not recognize the New Age philosophy in some of his teachings. For example, he taught positive imaging, his version of Norman Vincent Peale’s “Power of Positive Thinking” (which should have received closer scrutiny). In positive imaging you go into a sort of trance-like state and concentrating on forming the image of Christ (Korean, Semitic, Italian?) in your mind, and when you have done so you tell Him what you want Him to do. Thus, you become the master and He the servant.

More recently, we have had people all over America going off to meetings to learn a program, and then returning to teach people a new program that has filled many buildings. That is all it takes - success is numbers! One such program began when the pastor took a few people and went out into the community and asked people what they liked and disliked about going to church, and then they let the views of lost people dictate the ministry of the church, including replacing traditional instruments with band instruments, and hymns with Gospel rock and jazz. If you want to get the world in the church, just let a little of the world in your church. It is like the camel with his head in the tent. If he gets his head in you had better watch out! The world has a great appeal to those who are of the world and many believers are walking in the flesh. They are both vulnerable and dangerous!

But, someone might ask, are they not reaching a lot of people? Yes, they are “bringing them in,” but if they are fed the dribble of pop-psychology, and emotionalized through rock music and “testimonies” and never fed by the Word of God, they will never grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, they will never learn sound doctrine, and they will not be equipped to bring their children up in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Noah, as we have already noted, worked on the ark for 120 years and when he entered the boat, he entered it with the same seven people who were with him throughout the entire 120 years. He was not very successful, was he? How many pastors could stay in a difficult situation for two or three years without a convert, and not become discouraged? And think what other preachers would

be saying about him! They may be justified - but what about William Carey, and the Judsons?

Question! Why do we need to change evangelism programs every few years, if each program introduced is so outstanding? Is it not because it becomes, with many people, a matter of what they are doing for God, not a matter of what He is doing in them, with them, and through them? What is the difference? It is the difference between walking in the spirit and walking in the flesh - or working in the flesh rather than working in the spirit. Walking in the spirit means that the redeemed, sanctified human spirit is in total subjection to the Holy Spirit. There is nothing like doing the Lord's work in the flesh to quench the Holy Spirit. We must consistently remind ourselves that it is "...Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, 'says the LORD of hosts'" (Zech. 4"6b).

Early in my ministry older preachers were still telling a lot of Dwight L. Moody stories. One of my favorite was about the ministerial association that was prayerfully considering an area crusade. The were very passionate about the need for a revival and when the discussion turned to the evangelist, Moody's name came up. Most of the pastors very enthusiastically voiced their approval, but one young pastor objected. It seems that he was turned off by Moody's lack of education and polish, and possibly his evangelistic fervor. When others spoke in favor of Moody, the young man countered, "Dwight L. Moody has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit!" An older pastor responded, The issue is not whether or not Dwight L. Moody has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit. The important thing is that the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Dwight L. Moody."

3:5 - STEADFASTNESS OF CHRIST. *"May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ."* "Steadfastness" (denoting stability, consistence, and perseverance) is one of the basic characteristics of the mature person. It is essential to the spirit-filled Christian. James wrote the Jews of the dispersion: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4). Paraphrase these verses by substituting "Steadfastness: for "endurance" and you will see how important steadfastness really is. Older pastors have discovered, much to their chagrin, that Baby Boomers, as a whole do not show the steadfastness of their parents' and grandparents' generations.

To fully appreciate this verse we must note that it reads, "the steadfastness of Christ," and not simply steadfastness. Steadfastness in anyone is a good quality, but steadfastness **in** Christ is a sign of spiritual growth and maturity. This verse, however, does not say "in" Christ, it says "of" Christ.

"This may refer to our expectation of Christ's coming, or it may mean that the endurance or steadfastness of Christ during His life on earth should be our example."^{lxxxiii}

B. Paul's Commands, 3:6-15.

3:6 - WE COMMAND YOU. *"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.” Paul had expressed confidence in their obedience (3:4); here he put it to a specific test. On what basis does Paul, now in Corinth, command the Christians still living in Thessalonica? Is it on the basis of his Apostolic Authority? We must remember that this epistle has its source in the Holy Spirit, Who inspired its writing, and not in Paul. In this sense, it is a direct command to those believers and then to us today. Later, Paul would be dealing with some of the same problems in writing to the Corinthian church, warning them to withdraw fellowship from immoral and ungodly believers who refused to repent.

Apparently a many of the church members at Thessalonica were living up to the standards they had been taught. Paul charged the faithful members to discipline those who were misbehaving. The seriousness of the issue is seen in Paul’s command is in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The command - it not a suggestion - is given on the basis of the very nature and Character of Jesus Christ. Years ago Dr. J. Hardee Kennedy wrote a little commentary on Jonah in which he made a statement I that struck me as significant enough that I have often quoted it. He said, “Obedience to God is the most serious obligation of man.”^{lxxxiv} When Paul wrote the first epistle to the church, he told them to “warn those who are idle” (1 Thes. 5:14). Apparently the earlier warning had not been heeded. Now Paul prescribed harsher discipline.

Second-degree discipline involved the orderly separating of themselves from the lazy and the disorderly. This may have included excluding them from the life and meetings of the church (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11). This lack of contact would illustrate in a graphic way the spiritual gap that the behavior of the unruly had created. The offense was idleness, deliberate loafing which led some to interfere in the work of others (2 Thes. 3:11) and to expect others to provide for their needs (v. 12). This behavior was in direct disobedience to the apostles’ teaching.^{lxxxv}

AN UNRULY LIFE. When we see these words we may jump to the conclusion that they were following an immoral, or violent life, but it seems that the problem was that some of the Thessalonians, anticipating the Lord’s imminent return, ceased working, or resigned from their regular employment. Some of the members were so sure that the time of Jesus’ return so close that their work held no purpose - possibly some even thought He had already returned. Paul had dealt with this in the first letter (1 Thess. 4:1; 5:14). These people had misapplied the teaching concerning the return of Christ. “If the Lord is coming back soon,” they reasoned, “then we ought to give up our jobs and wait for Him to come!”

Down through the ages, fringe groups have made this same mistake. They have left the world, gone off to a mountain, and waited for the Lord to come back, only to return home embarrassed. How foolish people can be when they resist the clear teaching of the Word of God! Paul admonished the true believers to withdraw from these lazy Christians who were disobeying the Word, that the offenders might be ashamed and correct their foolish ways (vv. 6 and 14). The faithful were to treat the offenders as brothers and sisters, not as enemies; but they were not to put up with their sin.^{lxxxvi}

THE TRADITION. At this point in time “the tradition” denoted the oral teachings which the Christians at Thessalonica had received from Paul and his associates, and which were taught to new converts by leaders of the church after the departure of the missionaries. Since there was no New Testament at this time Paul’s teachings were authoritative. It would be decades before Revelation would be written (about A.D. 96), and it would be much longer before the canonization of the Scripture would occur. Until that time, churches lacking portions of inspired Scripture had to hand down the teachings (traditions) verbally from generation to generation. “Such teachings were handed down orally by Christian teachers and regarded as authoritative long before achieving written form. The church believed the letter reflected accurately Christ's teaching and the early church's preaching. Thus the letter written by human hands could be accepted as God's truth and thus as Scripture.”^{lxxxvii}

To reject or disobey those traditions was a serious matter. The faithful members of the church are now commanded to disassociate themselves from those members (“every brother”) who did not follow the teachings of Paul and his fellow missionaries. The two epistles Paul was inspired to write to this church would be a valuable addition to “the tradition.” To reject these teachings was tantamount to rejecting the teachings of Jesus Christ, Who had commissioned Paul.

First-century Christians called themselves "followers of the Way" (Ac 9:2). This was not purely an abstract notion. A part of the Christian way was a code of conduct by which believers were expected to live. This moral tradition was taught to the new Christian generation. Today, as in early churches, one of the primary purposes of teaching is to help members of the household of faith live redeemed lives.^{lxxxviii}

3:7 - FOLLOW OUR EXAMPLE. “*For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you...*” “For you yourselves know” suggests that they should have known because they had been taught to follow the example of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. In 3:7-10, Paul holds before them his own example of working so that he would not be a burden to others (even though as an apostle he had the right to be supported by them). While was with them, he had worked with his own hands and supported himself and his co-laborers (see 1 Thes. 2:9-12; Acts 20:33-35). He had repeatedly taught them to work faithfully as Christians and care for their own needs. The principle he followed was, “If any man won’t work, don’t let him eat!”

Paul justified the command he had given with the example he and the other missionaries had given them while in Thessalonica (vv. 7-10). Paul had commended the church for following his example in some areas (1 Thes. 1:6), but when it came to working some were not following it. Clearly, Paul regarded the apostles’ example as an authoritative model for their converts. They were to follow their example as well as to believe teaching. Paul and his associates were never lazy loafers or parasites.

Those who refuse to work become busybodies; they have time on their hands, and they interfere with other people’s business. This creates a bad testimony to the

unsaved (see Col. 4:5). The truth of the second coming of Christ ought to impel us to work harder and to be faithful to obey His Word.

When faithful Christians see unfaithful Christians living as they do, it often discourages them. “What’s the use!” they say. Paul encourages them, “Be not weary in well-doing! Don’t give up!” (v. 13) Let’s be found faithful when Jesus comes and we stand before Him.^{lxxxix}

3:8 - NOR DID WE EAT. “... *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.*” Great care must be practiced by the minister of the Word of God. In both letters to the Thessalonians Paul reminded them that he and his coworkers supported themselves by working with their own hands. In Second Thessalonians, he points out that they did this in order to set a good example for others. In the first, their motive was represented as insuring that no one would get the idea they were preaching for monetary gain (1 Thess. 2:5, 9). “The Philippians, however, did not think it was a burden to contribute to Paul’s support (Phil. 4:15, 16) even while he was in Thessalonica (Acts 16:15, 34, 40). Paul also refused support at Corinth, to show himself different from the false teachers. At the writing of this letter, Paul was working with Aquila making tents (Acts 18:3).”^{xc}

The minister is not just *what he is* in the community he is *what he appears to be*. Therefore, he must not only be honest and industrious, he must also appear to be honest and industrious. The servant of God is dependant upon the Church he serves for support. The First Epistle to the church at Corinth makes this abundantly clear: “Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:13-14).

The pastor may depends upon the church for financial support, but he must not go around with his hand out! The church should support the pastor in such a way that he may be able to support his family with dignity, just like any other member. But if the Lord’s servant seems obsessed with money or material things he will hinder the Lord’s work, effecting first his own ministry, and then that of others who will be judged by his attitude and conduct.

WITH LABOR AND HARDSHIP. This was a pattern Paul followed during his three missionary journeys. He worked as a tentmaker to support the mission team. No doubt anyone going into a new area to establish a new “religion” would be viewed with suspicion. The local citizens would be watching to see what the missionary was getting out of it, and the first hint of impropriety could cause immeasurable damage to the ministry of the missionary and to the church. There have been some charlatans who have preyed on church members, but during my entire ministry (and I was licensed in 1954) I have seen many, many dedicated servants who served sacrificially.

Some of the tel-evangelists have invited criticism from the people of America through some

of their games and gimmicks. During the seventies and eighties, I personally advised a number of Christians to give their money to a local church rather than sending it to certain TV ministries. I was often criticized for questioning these people - after all, these people were constantly parading pictures of the hungry children they were saving from the starvation and the afflicted they were healing. When the dishonesty and extravagance of a few - I stress, few - of these tel-evangelists led to their exposure by the media, no one ever apologized for condemning me. That was not a problem; the problem was that these fallen ministers affirmed the suspicions many people had that preachers are all in it for the money.

Work is honorable and it is necessary. It is said that when the Americanos first began moving to California, they found great ranches owned by Spanish aristocrats who disdained work. The Spanish speaking aristocrats, or their ancestors had received land grants as a favor from their monarch. Earlier generations had worked the land but they had left it in the hands of heirs who held physical labor, and those who performed it in contempt. The Americanos ended up with a major portion of the land for a number of reasons, including some that were dishonest. A primary reason, however, was their willingness to work. Honest work serves both human needs and the ministries of Christ. "Work is not a punishment for our sin. Sin does cause labor to be toilsome, often a struggle against circumstances (Ge 3). Labor is an essential part of our role as caretaker of God's world. To work is to be a steward of God's world."^{xc1}

3:9 - THE RIGHT. *"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."* Paul had labored long and hard to support himself and his companions in their missionary activities, not because he had no right to their support - as he will explain to the church at Corinth - but to establish a model for them. He wanted them to follow his example in putting God's work ahead of personal profit. Paul and his friends lived a miserly life in order to give these new converts an example of what it means to sacrifice for the good of others, and for the cause of Christ Jesus (Thes. 1:7). That the apostle and his associates had every right to receive material compensation for spiritual ministry is spelled out in 1 Cor. 9:3-14; 1 Tim. 5:18). They chose, however, to forego this right in order to teach the importance of self-sacrificing love and honest work. Paul did not imply that this right should always be sacrificed; he taught elsewhere that it is legitimate, that those who are taught should support their teachers (Gal. 6:6). His point here was that Christians generally should not expect other people to take care of them but should support themselves as much as possible."^{xcii}

My all time favorite preacher of the Gospel was R. G. Lee . We had earlier services in our mission church, which gave me an opportunity to get home each Sunday in time for the televised services from Belvue Baptist Church in Memphis. I also heard him many times in person. Once Dr. Lee told of a powerful business man he was asked to visit. When he called at his office, the man came out of his office and saw him talking with the receptionist. He demanded to know who he was and when Dr. Lee identified himself, the man arrogantly declared, "You preachers all alike. You cut off their money and they would all stop tomorrow." Dr. Lee responded, "That's a lie!" His boldness opened the door and in time this man called Dr. Lee and asked him to tell him how to be saved. R. G. Lee, commenting on this experience, said, "You can pay me for what I do Monday through Saturday, but nobody can pay me for what I do on Sunday!"

3:10 - IF ANYONE IS NOT WILLING TO WORK. *“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.”* Socialists in America are doing what the Communists in the old USSR never attempted to do - feed people whether they are willing to work or not. Paul’s philosophy was in agreement with the Biblical principle expressed in the commandment, “Six days you shall labor” (Ex.. 20:9).

Few people object to providing food for the “can not,” but most object to feeding the able bodied “will not.” They especially object to being taxed at a heavy rate to feed, shelter, and clothe people who have never worked and never intend to work. But the simple fact is that liberal social policies take money, via taxes, from the producers and give it to non-producers. In highest ideals of Americanism, especially among Christians, there is the desire to help those who need it, but it is frustrating to many people when they are taxed to support parasites who refuse to work.

A number of years ago a man who was recuperating from a work-related injury had felt that he was physically able to return to work. He checked on jobs in the area and found that the only job open at the time was a job that paid about what he was receiving from his union’s compensation policy. He told me the amount, and contemptuously declared, “I can make that much sitting in my chair at home.” The amount was about what my salary was at the time. I left there thinking about what would happen to his union if every member had that attitude.

Ronald Hawthorn was a very good friend for many years. He worked part-time with the Statistical Reporting Service (USDA) and operated his own small farm. Once when we were visiting he expressed his dismay over some people in his area who openly turned down work for fear that the work would place their food stamps in jeopardy. He needed to haul some hay and stopped at a place in town where he saw quite a few young adult men milling about the street around 9:00 in the morning. He tried to hire some of them but had to drive off without one hand - they were afraid it would “mess up my check.”

Years ago, L. M. Street, who owned a farm northwest of Marks, Mississippi, told me that when he needed a tractor driver that Spring, he inquired around and was told that there was a man in the state penitentiary at Parchman who could get out on a work-release if he would give the man a job. He checked with the authorities and with their permission offered the man the job. The prisoner said, It’s going to be hot out there this summer, and I am going to get out this Fall anyway. Besides, I am playing in a prison band, so I think I am going to stay in here.”

Paul’s answer to those able-bodied people who refuse to work - don’t let them eat. It is remarkable that with two thousand years of social evolution behind us we have improved so much on Paul’s solution! The Bible makes provisions for support for those who are physically (or mentally) unable to work to support themselves (1 Cor. 16:1-3); but for those who can and won’t, Paul’s answer is still appropriate. By feeding, clothing, and sheltering people will not work we free them to participate in all sorts of social ills, such as drugs, alcohol, gambling, and immorality. When I grew up on the farm we worked hard enough that no one had to worry about what we were doing at night - we were at home in bed.

Lest we misunderstand - and lest I be misrepresented - the individuals in view were not those who **could not work** but those who **would not work**. They were not to be supported by other Christians out of a sense of charity. "The loving thing to do for those drones was to let them go hungry so that they would be forced to do right and go to work. No Christian who is able but unwilling to work should be maintained by others who labor on his behalf."^{xciii}

3:11 - AN UNDISCIPLINED LIFE. *"For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies."* The apostles continued to hear reports (present tense of "hear," *akouomen*) that some of the members of the church were not working to support themselves. They were so certain that the Lord's return was so close that work did not seem to matter to them. Their attitude seems to have been, "what is the point in working if Jesus is coming again in a matter of hours or days?"

BUSYBODIES. Instead of being busy with a meaningful occupation, they had become busybodies. Instead of tending to their own business they were meddling in everyone else's business (see 1 Tim. 5:13). Is it not interesting that people who come up with some strange doctrine are never content to keep it to themselves?! That is the way cults - and yes, even sometimes new denominations get started. Certain members of the Charismatic movement in America during the sixties and seventies continually tried to impose their "experience" on other churches and denominations, often causing divisions in once strong churches.

Question: If you knew Jesus would come before the end of the day tomorrow, what is the most spiritual thing you could do until He appears? If you answer, "I would go to work and put in a good day's work," you would probably be in the minority. How can my mundane work be spiritual? American Christians need to understand just what God can do with millions of Christian soldiers on the job for Him every day. People are constantly amazed at the two years of service young Mormon males give to their church. I believe God's plan is for His people to be His witness, not for two years, but every year until Jesus comes for us, or until He calls us home. That is the literal application of the Great Commission:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20)

"Make disciples of all the nations" is the one command in the Great Commission. It is surrounded by three participles: Go is literally, going, baptizing, and teaching (v. 20). The first participle ("going") may be translated as a command ("Go") as it is in Matthew 2:8.

As you are going -where ever you go every day - make disciples. Does that mean I am to preach on the job? I am to witness to people at work? It means that you are His witness (Acts. 1:8) if His Spirit is in you, at work, at home, at play. You are holy before God, different from other

people. Lost people can hear a message about the Gospel any time. They can turn on a Gospel music station, watch a Christian broadcasting network, or engage someone in a discussion about “religion.” But what is desperately needed is to see a sermon. What an opportunity we have to be a living sermon for forty years!

Christians need to study the theology of work. How do we apply Christian principles at work? Young people, and many adults across America during the decade of the nineties wore bracelets, necklaces, and T-shirts with the letters WWJD (WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?). Those letters were often much more visible than the application of the principle. But it is fair to ask what Jesus would do if He held your job.

- 1) He would show up.
- 2) He would be on time.
- 3) He would put in a good day’s work.
- 4) He would do His own work.
- 5) He would accept responsibility for His work.
- 6) He would respect other workers.
- 7) He would respect His superiors.
- 8) He would stand behind His work.
- 9) He would be courteous.
- 10) He would control His temper.
- 11) He would keep His ego in check.
- 12) He would make practical applications of the Golden Rule.
- 13) He would not manipulate fellow workers for His own advantage.
- 14) He would not gossip about others,
- 15) He would not be jealous.
- 16) He would not be envious.
- 17) He would not be covetous.
- 18) He would be compassionate.
- 19) He would be loyal to fellow workers and to the employer.
- 20) He would not be paralyzed by anxiety.
- 21) He would work to make His company a better company.
- 22) He would work for the benefit of fellow workers.
- 23) He would save for a “rainy day.”
- 24) He would plan and invest for His retirement.
- 25) He would then have to spend a lot of time explaining to fellow workers what made His life different from their, and from other people they knew.

3:12 - SUCH PERSONS WE COMMAND. *“Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.”* Paul, ever considerate of his associates, included them in this commanded and in the exhorted, both of which were made “in the Lord Jesus Christ.” He had learned a lot since his split with Barnabas over John Mark.

WORK IN A QUIET FASHION. This was the opposite of what some of these people were

doing. They were not working, and they were not quiet! They needed to settle down and become engaged in regular employment to earn their living. “Then they would earn their own **bread** and not sponge off others. Paul had previously told them to do this (1 Thes. 4:11), but because some disobeyed he gave this sterner command.”^{xci}

During the cold war period between the USA and the USSR a man named Maurice Hindus wrote a book (*House Without a Roof*) about life as he witnessed it on a tour of the Soviet Union. There was an interesting part on the Baptists behind the Iron Curtain. Only official churches were allowed in the Soviet Union and worshipers could expect KGB agents to be there to observe what they were doing in any service. There were, however, underground churches and many people paid the supreme price to keep those churches going during the seventy-one years when Satan reigned over the Soviet Block countries. But Maurice Hindus observed something interesting with respect to the Baptists in the Soviet Union.

Commissars were assigned collective farms or plants and they were held strictly accountable for the production - remember, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” There was a major problem during this period. The state had robbed the people of any incentive in their work as well as any purpose in life. The Communists had closed churches and destroyed Scripture, so there was no solid foundation for social ethics or a work ethic. In despair, workers turned to alcohol. This presented an interesting problem for some of the commissars. Workers missed a lot of days because of “sickness,” especially on Mondays. But if his farm or plant failed to produce its quota the commissar might lose his job - or something a lot more precious to him.

Hindus observed that many of these commissars knew they had Baptists working for them, but did not report them, and did not hinder the practice of their faith for a very good reason. They assured them they would meet their production quotas. They never missed days because of alcoholism, They showed up for work on Monday morning, they were on time, and they produced while they were on the job. These people went about their work in a quiet way. So, by protecting the Baptists the commissar was protecting himself. Hindus, a Jew, also said that when he traveled in the Soviet Union he tried to stay in the home of Baptist people because they were sober, the food was good, the house was clean, and there were no bugs in the beds.

3:13 - AS FOR YOU. “*But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.*” Now Paul turns from the noisy busybodies who were a minority of the members to the faithful majority who were living and serving as the Lord intended. He urged them to continue doing what they knew to be right regardless of the troublesome minority who refused to work but apparently did not hesitate to sponge off the producers.

When other Christians take easy paths of irresponsibility and seem to prosper in them, it is easy to get discouraged and be tempted to join them. Though one may **tire in doing what is right**, he should never tire *of* doing what is right. In addressing the diligent as **brothers** and the idle as such people (v. 12), Paul implied that those who disobeyed this word from God were separating themselves by their behavior.^{xci}

If you are an overtaxed worker in America today and every day as you go to work you see able bodied young adults who are not working, have never worked, and never intend to work, what should your attitude be? First, Paul's answer will still work - if they won't work, don't let them eat! He did not say, if they cannot work, but if they will not work. Then seek tax and welfare reform through legal means. Pray for a change. There are many people on welfare who do not plan to stay there, but others who have no desire to do anything else. They are third and fourth generation welfare recipients. They feel that the producers owe them something, and may even think we are suckers for working to support them. What should we do? What would Jesus do (WWJD)? I believe he would seek to both teach and motivate others to work to provide for themselves and their families. He would probably encourage our representatives in Congress to pass tax reform measures and welfare reform so that we might help the needy but force able bodied men and women to find a job.

Someone told me about a young man who can do a lot of different jobs and do them well. He never has any trouble getting a job, but he only works long enough to save a little money, and then he quits his job and "has a good time" until the money is gone. Then he will go back to work - former employers often rehire him because he is "a hard worker" - and the cycle starts all over. If you had an opportunity, what would you say to this young man?

3:14 - IF ANYONE DOES NOT OBEY. Paul presses the point: "*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.*" To refuse to obey the commands of this letter is to refuse to obey God. This is inspired Scripture, the perfect Word of the perfect God. Refusing to obey God is to deny God and the consequences will be catastrophic. God expects His Word to be heard and obeyed. "Those who refuse to obey what Paul has to say were to be marked by the Thessalonian believers and treated accordingly. This action is not official church discipline, such as discussed in 1 Cor. 5, but personal corrective action by individual members of the church."^{xcvi} We ought not to encourage either physical or spiritual laziness. If each member of the local church would simply obey the Word of God, the church would be more holy, more joyful, and much more effective in witness and service.

One of the strengths of the Thessalonian church was its attitude toward the Word of God. They heard and received the Word, believed it (1 Thes. 1:5-6; 2:13), and shared it with others. "But apparently some of the believers were becoming hardened to the Word: they heard it but did not obey it. The evidence of their unbelief and disobedience was seen in the way they lived, and their lives were a disgrace to the church. We must be hearers *and* doers of the Word (James 1:22-27)."^{xcvii}

TAKE SPECIAL NOTE. The faithful are the ones who want to know God's will for their lives. This is addressed to them. Those who were disobedient had already demonstrate that Jesus is not really Lord in their lives. They have been warned twice, here and in 1 Thes. 4:11. Now, if any person refuses to repent Paul directs them to "not to associate him." Those who refused to repent and go back to work were to be ostracized from the fellowship of believers in order to shame them into changing their ways. Observe that the Scripture does not call for formal excommunication of the individual for this offense. What was called for was group disapproval and social ostracism, a serious enough penalty for a believer in a heathen society at that time. The faithful members of the church were not to have social contact with an idle person until he repented. The guilty person, or

persons, must know that they were being ostracized for the purpose of discipline if it was to do any good. The ultimate goal is restoration of the disobedient member.

Paul does not tell the church to take public action against the offenders in this instance. It seems to mean that each faithful member should do this individually. Since he does not prescribe discipline by the church, each member would have to make a prayerful application of this command as the Holy Spirit led, and as circumstances dictated.

Suppose a member of your church begins to frequent the gambling boats and casinos, or maybe it is social drinking, or going to R and X rated movies, or renting pornographic tapes. If you go with that member to the places where he indulges in these activities, will those who witness his behavior not assume that you approve of what he is doing since you are with him? If they know both of you are from a local church, will they not assume that your church approves of this conduct, or at the least, that it does not disapprove?

George Temple is married to my first cousin Juanita. They live in Meridian where they are active in the Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church. In fact, George is a deacon who, in spite of his own health problems, ministers to others as much as possible. Even while battling Leukemia, he has regularly visiting hospitals, nursing homes and shut-ins. He loves the Lord and His church. George was a successful business man in Meridian for many years before retirement, and is known by many people in the area.

Once George told me about a man who had a contract with a casino on an Indian reservation a short drive from Meridian. The friend told him he had run into a problem in cleaning chandeliers above some of the tables. Any way he went about it, either some of the dust or a little of the cleaner would fall onto the tables. He asked George to drive up with him to see if he could solve the problem. That was not his field, but the friend respected his opinion. George pointed to the badge the friend was wearing which identified him with his janitorial service and said, "the only way I will go into that place is for you to get me one of those badges." Within a few minutes after they entered the casino, George came up with a solution. As they were preparing to leave a lady from his church came up to him and exclaimed, "George! I didn't expect to see you here!" He pointed to the badge and said, "I want you to know that I am only here to help with my friend with this job."

Once when I was a young adult, in fact a seminary student, I went out to eat with Christian friends and as we were walking back to the car one suggested going to a night club. The other friend quickly agreed. I simply said, "You are going to take me home first!" They did both. Think of the possibilities a situation like that holds for the devil. When Jesus comes, I do not want Him to find me in any place that would dishonor His name.

There is one more thing here that is significant. There is no doubt that Paul regarded his writings as authoritative for the church and for individuals. He knew he was writing Scripture, even though it would be impossible for us to prove that he understood that there would be many inspired writings that would one day be canonized - brought together by church leaders under the sanction of the divine Author, the Holy Spirit. This epistle, like all Scripture, was to be obeyed because he was an apostle and his inspired words were the Word of God. The idle one was to be identified as such

by the members of the church and placed in a distinct category as disobedient.

3:15 - ADMONISH HIM. *“Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”* The purpose of withdrawing fellowship (3:14) from the member (or members) who refused to work but persisted in stirring up trouble was not to drive them out of the church and into the world, This is implied by “admonish him” in this verse. The purpose of discipline was reformation and restoration of the offender.

AS A BROTHER. It has been suggested that Paul was concerned that the Thessalonians might overdo the discipline, so he quickly urged them to treat the offender **as a brother**, not **as an enemy**. If the letter had originated with Paul I would concur, but this is the product of the mind of the Holy Spirit and as such there is no oversight. Those who are directed to carry out discipline against an offender must do so with fear and trembling. If they treat the offender as a “brother” they will do well, but if they treat him as an enemy, they become offenders themselves.

They were not to think of the offender as personally antagonistic toward them, nor were they to feel hostile toward him. His objective relationship to them as a brother in Christ should govern their feelings and actions, rather than subjective feelings that might be aroused by his idleness. They were to **warn** (*noutheteite*) **him**, not denounce him. Whereas they were to have no social contact with him they were not to break off *all* contact. They were patiently to admonish him to forsake the error of his ways^{xcviii}

V. CONCLUDING BENEDICTION AND GREETING, 3:16-18.

3:16 - PEACE. *“Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!”* This is Paul’s fourth prayer for the Thessalonian saints in this epistle (1:11-12; 2:16-17; 3:5). Now he turns from correction to intercession, with emphasis on the fact that without the Lord’s working (through the Holy Spirit) all exhortations would be ineffective. Paul’s concern here was for peace within the church through the unity of all members obeying the truth, and following sound doctrine. The Lord is the source of peace for the believer (1 Thes. 5:23) and Paul prayed that He would bestow this on the saints in Thessalonica.

“The Lord of Peace” is a glorious title for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 9:6, Jesus is seen as “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” The only real peace, the only eternal peace there ever will be, comes when the Prince of Peace indwells the heart of the believer. The presence of the Lord in our lives is the ultimate blessing

3:17 - MY OWN HAND. *“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.”* This letter was written by an amanuensis (secretary), perhaps Silas or Timothy, and only this closing salutation was written in

Paul's own hand - just as he did in other letters (Rom. 16:22; 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18). This "distinguishing mark" would prove that this letter was not a forgery (see 2:2). Many think he used an amanuensis because he had poor eyesight, and that he signed in the large script of one who has poor vision. His handwriting was undoubtedly distinguishable from his amanuensis and Paul must have known that it would be recognized by his readers. He wrote these words by his own hand to guarantee the authenticity of this letter to the recipients. In the case of this particular epistle such a personal salutation was especially needed because of a forged letter that had been received from someone who claimed to be Paul (2 Thes. 2:2).

3:18 - GRACE. *"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."* Paul uses the same benediction is used here as in 1 Thessalonians 5:28 except that "all" is added here. "All" sounds "a final appeal for unity in the church through the obedience of each individual to Paul's instruction and admonitions. Such unity can come about only through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."^{xcix}

What more could anyone ask for another Christian than "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ?"

We are chosen by grace, we are saved by grace, we are kept by grace, we are nurtured by grace, we are blessed by grace, and our future is secured by the grace of God. In the introduction to my study in Ephesians, I relate my experience with a retired pastor who, upon learning of my work in Romans, asked, "Do you believe in the Supremacy of Grace?" His tone said it all - my answer would determine how this man would look upon me from that day forth.

I have never majored on the jargon certain people expect of me. I prefer to simply let the Bible speak for me. While I knew exactly where a new acquaintance was coming from when he asked if I believed in the supremacy grace, I wanted to be careful in answering him. That he was a strong Calvinist I already knew, that he was a Hyper-Calvinist I suspected from reports that preceded him. After our conversation I gave our discussion a lot of thought. I know, I know! It would sound a lot better in the telling of it if I could say that had given him my ultimate answer instantly - you know how it goes: "he said"... "I said..." But it is not unusual for me to think of the ideal answer after the other person has gone on his way. I do so admire those who always have the right answer at the right time!

I now answer that question by explaining that I ascribe supremacy to a Person, not to an emotion, a force, or a movement. So, my answer is that, "I believe in the supremacy of God and the sufficiency of grace. God is absolutely supreme and His grace is absolutely sufficient." All blessings are yours by the sufficiency of His grace.

CONCLUSION

This Second Epistle to the Thessalonians is the product of the mind of the Holy Spirit. All Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit, it has been preserved by the Holy Spirit, and our minds and hearts are illuminated by the Holy Spirit so that we might understand it and apply it in our daily

life.

In the two Epistles to the Thessalonians we learn both how we should view the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and what we should be doing as we anticipate His return. There are three errors we may make in reference to Eschatology. The first error is to fail to consider end-time things. The second is to go to seed on the subject. The third is foster attitudes toward those who not agree with you that violate the First Two Great Commandments and dishonor our Lord. In Revelation 22 Jesus address the issue of His return:

Verse 12 - "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done."

Verse 17 - "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

Verse 20 - "He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

Verse 21 - "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen."

END NOTES

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 - ii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, QuickVerse, Parsons.
 - iii. The Bible Illustrator, QuickVerse, Parsons.
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 - xii. Ryrie Study Bible.
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- li. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
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 - liii. Ryrie Study Bible.
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 - lv. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
 - lvi. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
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