

- ***READ II Thessalonians 3:1-5*** Everyone loves a sequel, right!? Well...no that isn't always the case . Sometimes we would have to admit that the original movie, book, or other sort of production was fine just like it was by itself. I'm sure all of the oldest kids in the audience understand this well, and the only kids are shouting in their heads that their parents just simply knew that they couldn't improve on perfection. And yet, sometimes we recognize that sequels are necessary to continue on a storyline or follow up and answer questions that were left at the end of the previous movie or book.
- What we have within the New Testament are five times that the inspired writer felt the need to follow up his original writing with an additional writing that would hopefully aid in helping the recipients to an even further level of faithfulness and obedience to God. Sometimes these follow up letters were necessary to give further instructions. Sometimes they were needed for further clarification. Sometimes they were needed to commend the recipients on receiving the original letter well and with good results. And sometimes the follow-up was needed to rebuke the recipients for not receiving the original writing as they ought to have.
- Last Sunday evening we considered the first letter that was written to the Thessalonians, and we noted what were the main considerations of that letter. **1)** Paul sought to encourage these brethren as they were facing persecutions for their faith. **2)** Paul wanted to affirm within their minds that he had only led them in such a way that was pleasing and acceptable to God and Jesus Christ. **3)** He sought to motivate them to continue to excel in their faiths because their were stumbling blocks all around them. **4)** He wanted to educate them on some of the specifics concerning the return of Jesus.
- This first letter that Paul wrote was based upon the report that had been delivered to him by his trusted partner Timothy, and it seems that it wasn't long before Paul once again caught wind of some struggles that were taking place among the disciples who were in Thessalonica. Therefore, we find Paul's follow-up to the Thessalonians coming very soon after the first letter was written and sent off. Some speculate that this letter was written and sent off not even 4-6 months after the first was delivered, but regardless of whether or not it was that soon, it must be recognized that Paul felt it absolutely necessary to quickly write to these brethren again so that they might be strengthened and encouraged in their faiths before God. This evening, let's consider this follow up to the Thessalonians and some practical points that we can take away from it for ourselves.

I. What I Noticed When I Read *The Second Letter To The Thessalonians*

A. Paul offers hope in the midst of continued persecutions. (1:1-12)

1. In his first letter to these brethren, Paul seemed to really put a lot of effort into encouraging these brethren to be strong in the face of persecutions that they were enduring at the hands of their own countrymen and even from the Jews. He spoke glowingly of their faith and wanted them to know that others were aware of their struggles. These kind words from Paul were most certainly needed because it seems as if the struggles they were facing only continued and maybe even grew worse after Paul sent off this first letter.
2. Paul again expresses how thankful he is for these brethren at the onset of this letter. This time he expresses his thankfulness for them based upon the fact that they had continued to grow in their faith and love for one another. Because of these positives attributes, Paul again states that he was speaking proudly of these brethren among the other churches that he had visited. Truly these were words of great encouragement to disciples who might have felt that they were all alone in their struggles with tribulations and sufferings. **(1:3,4)**
3. Paul then tries to provide them with further encouragement by stating that they were only suffering that which was appropriate for those that were faithful to God. *"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.” (1:5) This reminds me very much of what is recorded in **Acts 5:40-42** when the Apostles were flogged for their work in the name of Jesus, but they went on from that incident *“rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.”* They knew that their sufferings were happening for the best of reasons, and that encouraged them to continue to do good work for the Lord. This seems to be exactly what Paul is trying to do in this instance for the Thessalonians.

4. Additionally, Paul seeks to encourage them by reminding them that those who were persecuting them would one day receive their recompense for the evil that they had been doing. On that day when Jesus returns, those who had been evil and wicked towards these disciples would face retribution, and they would be cast away into eternal destruction away from the Lord. **(1:7-10)**
 5. Paul then closes this section by offering a prayer for these saints that they would always be counted worthy of their calling and that through their work of faith the name of Jesus would be glorified. What encouragement to know that this was the prayer of an Apostle for you! **(1:11,12)**
- B. Paul further clarifies concerning the coming of Jesus. (2:1-12)**
1. Speaking of the return of Jesus...Paul again has to again revisit this subject from the standpoint of whether or not it has already taken place. In the first letter, Paul had done everything he could to reassure them that Jesus had not yet return. He told them that the return of Jesus would be evident and obvious because there would be a great shout from the arch angel and the trumpet of God would sound. **(I Thessalonians 4:16)**
 2. Unfortunately, it seems that there were still some doubts among these brethren on account of there being some among them who were causing these doubts. It might have been that there were some who were teaching by either word of mouth or letter that the day of the Lord had already come. **(2:1,2)** This might seem weird to us that such a thing could be believed, but we have to consider that they simply did not have the ease of access of information like we do today regarding world events or even the entire revelation of God that has been revealed to us. They might have very well been thinking that they had been left behind with this event!
 3. Yet, Paul goes into a bit of greater detail at this time concerning what would take place before the Lord actually did return for His people. Paul begins by saying that a great apostasy would come before the end. There would also be a *“man of lawlessness”* that would cause much trouble within the world. This man would be noticeable based upon his trying to exact himself to the place of God. This type of language is very similar to what both Isaiah and Daniel warned would take place before great judgments of God would come upon different peoples. **(2:3,4)**
 4. In the following verses **(2:5-12)**, Paul continues to rehash some of the things that he had already told them in person while he was with them for the short amount of time he was. He also speaks more concerning the evil deeds of this *“man of destruction”*, but we simply don't have time in this study to dig too much into the specifics of what Paul says. However, I do want to make mention that Paul was sharing these writings with these brethren so they could spend all of their time speculating whether or not any particular time was just prior to Jesus's return. Instead, I am convinced that Paul shares all of this so that the brethren can take their attention off of worrying about the end times and instead focus on continuing to grow in their faith and love.
- C. Paul encourages continued following of the Apostolic traditions that they had received. (2:13-3:5)**
1. They could be successful in continuing to grow in that faith and love by being fully embracing their being chosen by God through the Gospel. They had experienced salvation through their continued sanctification by the leading of the spirit and their faith in the truth that had been delivered to them. Paul also encourages them to be continually dedicated to the traditions that were being taught to them by Paul, Silas, and Timothy. It was Paul's prayer that is in **vv.16,17**, that they would be comforted and strengthened by their good works for the Lord.

2. As the next chapter begins, Paul requests that they would reciprocate the prayers that Paul had offered on their behalves. He wished that they would pray for Paul and his companions as they put in great effort to spread the Gospel rapidly in the places they found themselves. How great would it have been for their to be disciples like the Thessalonians everywhere!? This was Paul's request, that they pray that such a thing might happen and that those who were against them would be stopped in their wicked deeds. **(3:1,2)**
 3. Paul then goes on to state that his full confidence was in the Lord and His faithfulness to His people who were striving to do His will. He knew that the Lord would be with him and all of those who were being pursued by the evil one. Much like what we saw in **I Thessalonians 4:1,2**, we again find Paul saying, *"We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command."* **(4:3,4)** Paul again closes this thought with a short prayer that God would direct their hearts in the way it ought to go. **(4:5)**
- D. Paul rebukes those who had failed to continue to pursue excellence in all things. (3:6-18)**
1. Paul then closes this letter with something that we haven't seen at all up to this point in his writings to the Thessalonians...Paul offers a strong rebuke to some brethren who were not keeping their heads down and working hard in everything they did, but instead they were leading undisciplined lives, not working, and even worse they were being busybodies. **(3:6-11)**
 2. The problem seems to be that there were some of these brethren who had stopped making it their ambition to live quiet lives. **(I Thessalonians 4:11)** They had instead decided to be irresponsible, lazy people, who were allowing their lives to descend into chaos. We don't know why exactly these people had decided to resort to this type of lifestyle, but Paul was not going to have any of it.
 3. He decided to rebuke them for this behavior while reminding them that they had a good example to follow in Paul and his companions and how they behaved when they had been with these brethren. **(3:7-9)** If people were not willing to follow these commands then Paul states that it was time for these brethren to be noted. This noting of their behavior was to be done as an attempt for these unruly brethren to see the error of their ways, so that they might return to righteous living. This was not to be done with a spirit of hatred or anger, but it was to be done lovingly with the best interest of the brethren in mind. **(3:12-15)**
 4. Paul then closes this letter by offering a final prayer for these brethren that they might have peace in every circumstance which of course would include their persecutions they were facing. Paul wanted greatly for the Lord to be with them, and he made sure to include his own distinguishing mark in this letter so that they brethren could have full confidence that it was coming from the Apostle Paul himself.

II. Practical Points:

A. God will take care of those who suffer in His name.

1. Paul was keenly aware of and could sympathize with these Thessalonian brethren in their sufferings because he himself, along with the rest of the Apostles, had suffered for the cause of Christ. Therefore, he surely must have known the pain and distress that would come with such sufferings. Additionally, he would have known what it was that gave him encouragement when those sufferings and difficulties weighed heavy on his heart. It must have been that Paul himself was encouraged by the thought that his sufferings only proved that the evil one was after him because he was doing good work for the kingdom. Further, it must have brought him great comfort in knowing that God was going to take care of all of it in the end.
2. Likewise, we should be able to find comfort in the fact that when we suffer for Christ's sake, we are proving ourselves as faithful to God and His kingdom. Those who are going with the flow of wickedness and evil are not going to be persecuted by others who are evil for living in such a

way, but those who are trying to go against the flow of evil in the world will more than likely be the ones who are singled out for persecution. When such a thing happens, we can find comfort in knowing that we, too, have been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus.

3. Lastly, we can become discouraged during our struggles by thinking that God is not looking out for us and that He has forgotten about us in our struggles. However, Paul reminds the Thessalonians and ourselves that God will repay those who have persecuted us in the end. They might have their way in this life, but in the end they will realize the error of their ways when they are cast out of the presence of God. This doesn't mean that we should hope for their eventual destruction...we should want for them to repent! However, if they refuse to repent and continually harm the people of God...they have earned their eternal punishment. That will vindicate His people!

B. We can trust what has been handed down to us by the Apostles.

1. It seems that the Thessalonians were continually be disturbed by some who were posing as if their teachings were authoritative as the words of the Apostles, but those teachings only led to furthered worry and distress on the part of the Thessalonians. Therefore, Paul sought to encourage them to only stand firm in those teachings and instructions that had been handed down by those people who were truly speaking for the Lord. In this instance for the Thessalonians, those who had spoken to them for God had been Paul, Silas, and Timothy.
2. For us, not only do we have these two letters to the Thessalonians, but we also have all of the inspired writings of the New and Old Testament to serve as the teachings that hand down the traditions that we are to hold to concerning the will of God. These books have been time tested and they have passed every test held against them. We can have confidence that these words are truly from God, and we ought not allow ourselves to be troubled by teachings that cannot be substantiated from the text.
3. Additionally, we must be sure that our faith and the actions we do based upon our faith can be traced back to what is found in this book. If we cannot do so then how are we any better than those people who were causing the Thessalonians trouble? The reality is that we would find ourselves in exactly the same place. We must be sure only stand firm in those traditions that have been handed down to us by the Apostles and other of God's inspired spokesmen.

C. We will never reach a point where we are not in need of being reminded of needed teachings.

1. It had not been very long at all since Paul had last written to these brethren, and yet he felt it necessary to go ahead and write to them again. Some might see this as Paul being overbearing or meddling in their affairs, but this shouldn't be our mindset at all. Instead, we should see this as Paul's deep and abiding love for these brethren being born out in action. He knew that there were some things that they needed to be constantly reminded of, and the exact same thing is true for us. We are always in need of reminders from God's Word and its teachings.
2. This is why we find it so important to constantly be in God's Word on a regular basis. I can't tell you how many Bible classes I have been in or how many times I have taught in Hebrews myself... but I am still loving the class that we are having in the auditorium that is being taught by Duane. There are constantly new insights and lessons that can be learned, and there is always new encouragements to be experienced. Paul knew that these brethren were in need of insight, lessons, and encouragement, and I am convinced that if these brethren needed these things then we most certainly are in need of them, as well.

The Thessalonians continued to have difficulties following Paul's first letter, and I feel confident in saying they probably had difficulties following this second letter. However, I am also confident in my thoughts that they were able to approach those difficulties with a renewed sense of confidence knowing that God would be with them every step of the way. It is my hope that our continued reading and study of God's Word would leave us with the exact same confident mindset. May we go throughout this week all the more committed to God's Word, and may we reap the confidence and increased faith in doing so.