

## **2 Thessalonians Study Questions**

### **Chapter 1**

*It is likely that this letter to the church at Thessalonica was written soon after the letter of 1 Thessalonians, once Paul had gotten word back from the believers there of some of the things they were dealing with.*

#### **1:1-2**

Paul opens this book with virtually the same exact wording as 1 Thessalonians. Take a minute to look back and note the similarities.

#### **1:3**

The same thankfulness and cause for praise is given here as previously in 1 Thessalonians. What is named as causing Paul to feel these things?

A commentator, Robert L. Thomas, points out that Paul had prayed for the Thessalonians to grow in love and faith in the first epistle, so it is fitting that he would be rejoicing now over their growth in these ways.<sup>i</sup>

Why is the author thanking GOD for the growth of the believers' faith rather than thanking the Thessalonians themselves for their faithfulness?

#### **1:4**

What are the reasons given behind the missionaries' boasting?

What speaks the most to you personally about God's greatness? What causes you to love and worship God more deeply when you look at the lives of other believers?

Is it okay to boast in people rather than God alone? In 1 Thess. Paul said the same kind of thing: "For what is our hope of joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy." (speaking of the Thessalonian believers in 2:19-20)

What else, at the same time, do we need to remember about all human beings? We want to be careful to not put people up on a pedestal or thing too highly of them.

Where is the balance between admiring and praising people and yet recognizing their frailty and shortcomings? Use Scripture and examples of people in the Bible as you answer this.

Thomas helpfully comments that some of the Thessalonian believers had apparently felt inferior because of failures, so they themselves were not inclined to boast. Paul's words here would have encouraged them.<sup>ii</sup>

Paul models here one way to love people whom he is discipling: encouragement. How encouraging of a person are you? Are you slow or quick to praise people and encourage them? Would God have you to increase in your encouragement of fellow believers in order to more effectively love His church?

## 1:5

What is Paul saying is the evidence of the righteous judgment of God? To what is the "this" referring?

By what are they considered worthy of the kingdom of God?

(Note also that verse 11 of this same chapter uses the same word, about them being worthy of His calling. Also, Philippians 1:27-28 contains similar language that may help us clarify this verse: "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God)."

In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Thomas notes this glorious truth:

*"It will not be self-earned but a gracious divine impartation resulting from the decision to believe in the Lord Jesus who himself earned the believer's forgiveness of sins and eternal life by dying a sacrificial death. The worthiness of the Thessalonian believers had already been established before persecutions came."<sup>iii</sup> " Hallelujah!*

## **1:6**

What are the two things God says in this verse that He will do when Jesus is revealed from heaven?

To what day is this "revealing" referring? Look to Revelation 19 to further enlighten you.

In bringing up this future day, to what are the missionaries pointing the Thessalonians for hope and encouragement?

As *you* interact with others, to what do you point them for comfort? When seeking to minister to hurting and needy people, do you point them to something more temporal, or to our more permanent hope?

## **1:8**

Who are the people stated as being the recipients of vengeance of Jesus? Are these two different groups of people, or one in the same? Why?

Vengeance is an awfully strong word and even sounds hateful to our ears. Yet our God—who is the very essence of love—the Lord Jesus—is said to be going to inflict vengeance. How do we reconcile these two concepts and attributes of God?

Look at Psalm 94 and read more on God's vengeance.

Here the Thessalonians are called to obey the gospel. We know that gospel means “good news.” How do we obey good news? What does this mean?

### **1:9**

Who will be the one executing the destruction mentioned in this verse? \_\_\_\_\_ Yet, it says that they will not experience the presence of the Lord. How might that work?

Take a few minutes to meditate on the terrors that await the unbeliever at the coming of Christ. To what do these thoughts drive you? Does the Lord motivate your heart in any direction as a result of these truths?

Complete these thoughts now by consoling yourself with these words; “Yes, He is coming as a righteous judge to judge the world. But for you, he is coming as a husband with gifts. Instead of a sword, you will get a crown. In the place of pleas for protection, you’ll be filled with praise, rejoicing at the sight of the lover of your soul.”<sup>iv</sup>

### **1:10**

What is given here as the purpose for which Jesus will be coming on that day?

Pretend you are talking to a brand new believer. Give a very simple explanation of the Christian word “glorify.” What does it mean for God to be “glorified in His saints?”

As humans, it is sinful for us to desire to “marveled at.” God calls us to humility and a lowly view of ourselves, rather than pride. How then, is it right for Jesus to come to earth in order to be “marveled at?”

Why does Paul count the Thessalonians among those who will glorify Jesus and marvel at him, according to this verse? What is his basis for this assumption?

How do you treat the testimony that is God's Word? With what kind of sobriety and urgency and diligence (or lack thereof) do you approach your time in it?

In our time and culture, even those who call themselves believers argue over the inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture. Where do you stand personally? Do you trust that His Word does not have any real contradictions? Do you believe what 2 Timothy says, that "ALL Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness?"

If you say you believe it in your head, how does your life reflect it? Would this be evident to others about you? What areas in your life now might be contradicting your professed belief in His Word?

### **1:11**

To what "end" is Paul referring here? What is the calling that Paul is speaking of? A calling to faith? To ministry? To a holy life? Romans 8:29-30 says, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." Allow this to inform your answer.

Pauls' prayer for the Thessalonians reveals that our salvation is more than a verbal profession of faith or intellectual assent to orthodox doctrine. See James 2:19 . What all does saving faith, then, entail?

How is one ever “worthy” of His calling, as mentioned here? This is related to the question in verse 5. We are all sinners saved by grace alone through faith alone. That being the case, what would Paul have in mind here about us being worthy?

GOD who is the actor in these prayers. Sanctification is the process by which He makes worthy those who are in and of themselves unworthy.

Is it an option for us to not grow in sanctification, or to being being “made worthy?” What verses support the idea that we will indeed grow if we are saved?

If we are guaranteed to grow into the likeness of Christ and being “made worthy”, then why does Paul pray for that?

The second part of this verse reads, “...may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power...” We can be resolved to do good and work out our faith, but apart from the work of God through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we will not be effective.

## **1:12**

Paul always reminds us of the ultimate purpose of things. What, stated here, is the purpose of our being made worthy and fulfilling every resolve...?” (the “so that” tells us)

Usually we understand what it means for Jesus to be glorified in us. What, though, does it mean for us to be glorified in Him? See below some verses to guide our thinking...

“Humble yourself before the Lord, and He will exalt you.” (James 4:10)

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (1 Peter 5:5)

“Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.” (Proverbs 10:6)

What else could it mean for us to be glorified in Jesus?

In this small book of three chapters, the title “Lord Jesus” or “Lord Jesus Christ” appears **eleven** times! And nowhere do we see the name Jesus unless “Lord” precedes His name. In addition to that, we see the word “Lord” another six times. What do you think this reveals about Paul’s understanding of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity? What implications and applications does this have for us and all of His followers?

The phrase “according to the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ” modifies the verb “be glorified.” So it is by God’s grace that we glorify Christ, and He, us. Apart from God’s grace, we cannot glorify God. It even takes God’s work to glorify Himself. Truly “apart from (Jesus) we can do nothing,” as we are told in John 15.

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*To wrap up your time in the Word, take a minute to pray about the things the Lord has brought to mind during this time. What sin needs to be confessed? What praise needs to be voiced? Allow your heart to overflow in thankfulness for God’s Word, His church, and His Son’s future return.*

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<sup>i</sup> Thomas, Robert L. “2 Thessalonians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 307.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, 308.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid, 310.

<sup>iv</sup> Fitzpatrick, Elyse. *Comforts from the Cross*, 105.

# 2 Thessalonians Study Questions

## Chapter Two

### 2:1-3

v. 1 Notice the language of us being “gathered together” to Jesus. This is reminiscent of the metaphor about Jesus’ affection for God’s people from Matthew 23:37:

*“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”*

We can find this gathering language as well in the book of Psalms. Isn’t it fascinating to encounter words and phrases in different places in Scripture and see how they fit together, as God causes his prophecies to be fulfilled over time and his types to grow to fruition in their fullest forms?

What, from vv. 1-3, apparently, were the Thessalonians being tempted to feel and believe, which Paul was needing to correct?

How could the believers there possibly have thought that Jesus’ return had already happened? To us, it seems somewhat silly, doesn’t it? Robert L. Thomas offers an explanation this way:

*“These readers who knew about the day knew that its earlier phase would be a time of heightened persecution for the saints. Their suffering had already been so severe that someone tried to convince them that the period was already in progress, even though the Lord had not yet come....”<sup>i</sup>*

What did Paul say must happen first, before the return of Jesus?

What phrases does Paul use to describe the “man of lawlessness?” See also verses 9-10.



## **2:4**

Will this be a literal temple of God mentioned here, or a figurative one? And will he literally be proclaiming himself to be God, or by his actions showing that forth? Why?

## **2:6-7**

Paul tells them that they know who/what it is that restrains this man of lawlessness. Do you know who it is? There are different theories on who/what this restrainer might be. According to the *ESV Study Bible*, it could be the Roman Empire or emperor, the Holy Spirit, or the Archangel Michael. For further reading on the basis of these opinions, see Daniel 0:13, 20-21, and Rev. 12:7.

## **2:7**

“mystery of lawlessness”—Why might lawlessness be called a mystery here?

## **2:8**

This verse sounds not unlike Isaiah 11:3-4: “He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ear hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; *and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth*, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.”

Marvel at the power and glory of Jesus, our Champion! Take a minute to praise God for the present victory over sin we have in Him and also the ensured, pre-ordained ultimate defeat of evil at the end of the age.

## **2:10-12**

It is very significant that we note the reasons for those who “are perishing.” What does verse 10 tell us is the reason?

Now see also in verse 11 what happens. Who sends the strong delusion, and what is the reason behind it?

How can it be that God would do such a thing? Why would he ever want someone to believe what is false when He is the God of truth, and Satan is the Father of Lies?

List out some character traits that you know of God below.

Did you put justice on the list? If so, it's God's justice we see at work in this verse. It is right for God to punish sin. It is correct for a holy God to be intolerant of unrighteousness, and for there to be severe consequences for such rebellion.

For further comfort of your heart about the goodness of God, read 1 Peter 1:17: "And if you call on Him as Father *who judges impartially according to each one's deeds*, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile..." He can be trusted to judge impartially and correctly.

Need we be concerned that we ourselves might be deceived by the lawless one? See Matthew 24:24 and Revelation 13:5-8 to aid you in your thinking.

## **2:12**

See here the interesting contrast between belief in truth and sinful pleasure. These would not normally be things we would see as opposites. What do we learn from this?

Where is your delight? From where do you derive your greatest pleasure? Where our treasure is, there our heart will be also, we are taught by Jesus in the gospel of Matthew (6:21).

## **2:13**

What contrast is indicated here by the word "but?"

Allow your mind to ruminate a moment on the fact that believers are called “beloved by the Lord.” What a lavish phrase! That the Maker of the universe would stoop to care for us whatsoever is remarkable. How much more shocking is it that He would call undeserving us His *beloved*!

What does the phrase “as the firstfruits” mean? What Scriptures or biblical concepts come to mind that enlighten your understanding of what Paul is talking about here?

Through what, according to this verse, are we saved?

We see an evident connection between God himself (the Spirit) and man (belief in the truth) that brings about our salvation. God works to save us by giving us the gift of faith (Eph. 2:8-9).

## **2:14**

Paul again refers to a “calling.” To what were the Thessalonians called? (See end of v. 13)

And *through* what are they said to be called?

Paul calls the gospel “our” gospel. Why do you think he would choose to use that possessive pronoun rather than merely saying, “the” gospel.” To what is he referring?

A purpose is given at the end of this verse. Why did God call our Thessalonian brothers and sisters?

In what way do believers obtain the GLORY of the Lord Jesus Christ? We obtain salvation. We obtain the gift of the Holy Spirit. We obtain His promises. How do we obtain His *glory*, per se? In chapter one, we also encountered this concept of us being glorified in Jesus, as well as Jesus in us (1:12).

Turn back to 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 16-18, and read of a future glorification of which we will be a part. Then take a minute to praise our Lord for his gracious generosity in sharing His glorification with us after rescuing us from the grip of Satan and sin.

Read here a quote by George Swinnock (a Puritan) on what happens after death for a believer. The same could be said about our leaving this earth upon Christ's return:

*"The soul must be delivered from the prison of the body, so that it may enjoy the glorious liberty of the sons of God. This bird of paradise will never sing merrily, nor sing the praises of its Maker perfectly, until it is freed from this cage."* Perhaps this is also some of what it looks like to obtain His glory.

## **2:15**

The "so then" tells us that with the guarantee of their salvation, the Thessalonians are to therefore do certain things. What are they to do?

Allow Ephesians 4:14 to shed light on what it might mean to stand firm: "...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes..."

In what ways do we today need to be reminded to do the same things? What temptations do we face in our culture that might draw us away from belief in the true gospel? What competing ideas could lure us, unawares?

## **2:16**

In this verse we see all three members of the Trinity at work. First the Lord Jesus Christ is mentioned, then God our Father, and we also find the word "comfort" right here twice. We know elsewhere that the Holy Spirit is called our Comforter. It's always worth noting verses or passages in which we see the members of the Godhead working together. It is evidence for what we believe to be orthodoxy—that our deity consists of one God in three persons all working together in unity and harmony. Where else in this epistle do we see more than one member of the Trinity mentioned together?

We see that Paul chose to use verbs in the past tense in this verse. He LOVED us and GAVE us eternal comfort and hope, etc. In what way has God done these things in the past? To what is he referring?

## 2:17

On the heels of the last verse, we see the continuation of Paul's prayer. God, who has acted in the past, is being summoned through a benediction to act in the present to comfort the hearts of the Thessalonians. How encouraging it is to think that the Lord has not only acted in the past to accomplish this eternal comfort, but also comforts His people now. He knows our frailty and weakness, and is there to provide more grace in times of need. He delights to show Himself sufficient for us!

Paul also calls God to "establish them in every good work and word." Look back to the last chapter. We see similar wording in another verse. What verse is it? \_\_\_\_\_

When we see repetition in a book of the Bible, it gives us a glimpse into the heart and mind of the author. He is emphasizing those things for a reason. Why might Paul be repeating a similar prayer that God establish their good works?

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Wrap up your time in this chapter by spending some time praying about the things the Lord has brought to your mind as you've read and studied. Thank Him for being our ever-present Comforter. Ask Him for strength to maintain the faith over your lifetime, forever holding to the one true gospel. Praise Him for our salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Request more grace to trust Him for His justice and to share the gospel with those who are perishing, that they might know the eternal life we walk in daily.

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<sup>i</sup> Thomas, Robert. "2 Thessalonians," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 319.

<sup>ii</sup> Swinnoek, George. *The Fading of the Flesh and the Flourishing of Faith*, 17.

## **2 Thessalonians Study Questions**

### **Chapter 3**

#### **3:1**

What does Paul mean by praying that the Word of the Lord might speed ahead? Speed ahead of what? Move quickly how? Can you think of any other verses that might enlighten our understanding of this concept?

#### **3:2**

What is it that keeps men from being wicked and evil?

#### **3:3**

What a striking and lovely contrast between the end of the last verse and this one! Not all have faith, but **the Lord** is faithful!

What are the two things that Paul claims here the Lord will do for them?

How does God guard us against the evil one? We know that He appoints us to suffer for His name (Phil. 1:29) and that sometimes He ordains calamity. We also find in the book of Job an allowance and even initiation on God's part of Satan's testing Job. We know many stories of Christians who have undergone unbelievable grief and suffering and even death in times of persecution at the hands of evil men. How then does God guard us against the evil one?

1 John 5:18 says, "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God [Jesus] protects him, and the evil one does not touch him."

How would you explain this concept of God's protection to a child who is fearful of monsters or "bad guys" while also faithfully upholding the hard reality that God sometimes permits and uses evil?

### **3:3-4**

What are the two things here to which Paul is wanting the Lord to direct the Thessalonians' hearts?

In what way would God's love and Christ's steadfastness be a help to them right now? How could the knowledge of these characteristics of our God work itself out practically in their lives?

What about in your life?

### **3:5**

Is the "love of God" phrase used here referring to a love FOR God, or GOD's love? Why?

As pointed out by Thomas, it's God's love and Christ's steadfastness that provide the strongest possible motivation for continued obedience in the Christian life.<sup>1</sup>

### **3:6**

See how strong a warning Paul is issuing to the Thessalonians in this verse! He not only commands them what to do, but also strengthens the command by grounding its authoritative nature in the name of Jesus.

Take a look at 3:11. What had Paul, Silas, and Timothy heard about the Thessalonians that needed such strong correction?

What were the Thessalonians to do with a believer who was living an undisciplined, idle lifestyle?

### **3:8**

What was Paul's reason for this instruction? Why were they to be working hard?

### **3:11**

For those of us who are wives and mothers, there is a work that God has called us to in his Word. See Titus chapter 2. What work is that?

How are you doing at this work? How often do you neglect this work for other kinds of busyness?

Are there good things in your life, whether you are single or married, that are receiving disproportionate amounts of time over and above the BETTER and BEST things? If so, what? And how would God have you to make changes to align more with his will?

### **3:12**

Notice that this section is bracketed on both ends by the word “command.” Once again Paul forcefully instructs that they are to be working rather than living idly.

So we see that Paul takes hard work and financial independence quite seriously. It’s very common for people to come to a church (sometimes claiming to be believers) and expect handouts, who might not be motivated to get a job. Are we to help them, according to the application of these verses? If not, how exactly should we interact with them?

We are likely going to face more people now than ever who are relying on the government to pay for their lives and who refuse to get jobs, in order to continue receiving their government check. Let us be ready with these verses in our minds to, in love, address this sort of thinking.

### **3:13**

How easy it is to grow weary in doing the things God has given us to do! Whether this command is to the wealthier believers in the congregation who had been helping the less fortunate, (as the *ESV Study Bible* notes indicate), or whether to the Thessalonian believers who were likely weary of disciplining the idle, (as suggested in the *Expositor’s Commentary*), or whether to the church in general about continuing in the good work of faithful church discipline, it is unclear. In any case, God calls us to persevere in doing what is good.



To what has God called you personally at the moment that is causing you weariness and temptation to give up? Hear His encouraging Word here to persevere.

### **3:15**

Church discipline is for those who claim to be believers, and it is for the purpose of restoration. Ideally, when a brother is confronted in his sin, and actions are taken to call him back, he will repent and be restored to fellowship. Discipline should never degenerate into meanness or cruelty, with a purpose of vengeance or degradation. He is to be treated as a brother.

### **3:16**

Jesus is called the “Lord of peace” here. In what ways do the Thessalonians need a Lord like this?

In what way does God give us peace? He gives us Himself! He is with us! How marvelous a thought! We are His, and He is ours!

### **3:17**

How does Paul authenticate his letter at the end?

Look back to chapter 2, verse 2. You can see here that it seems someone might have been claiming to have written something by Paul who was not Paul.

According to Thomas in *The Expositor’s Commentary*, Paul’s handwriting at the end would have “furnished a key by which his Thessalonian readers could recognize a spurious Epistle bearing his name.”

<sup>ii</sup> So, his signature helped to ward off false teaching.

How assuring it is to hear the words of this letter from one who has suffered so much himself. Wouldn’t it be so different to receive a letter like this from someone who has not been touched personally by deep suffering? As 2 Corinthians 1 says, God uses those who have been comforted in suffering to comfort others in their sufferings.

As we wrap up this final chapter of our Bible study, allow yourself to receive this prayer offered for you:

*Lord God of the heavens and Lord of our days, direct us all to your perfect love and the steadfastness of our Lord Jesus as we seek to persevere in our own lives. Lord, grant us grace to endure whatever you might have for us, not growing weary, and trusting you to be the good, kind and wise God that you are. May you use us, as you did Paul and his companions, to take your word to the nations and to delight in Jesus right here where we are today, for your glory and our good. We pray these things in the glorious, majestic, powerful name of Jesus, our coming King, Amen.*

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<sup>i</sup> Thomas, Robert L. "2 Thessalonians" in *The Expositor's Commentary*, 333.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid*, 337.