

INTRODUCTION AND 2 THESSALONIANS

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Contents

Introduction to 2 Thessalonians	2
I. Reminder of Setting	2
II. The Letter	2
The Text	2
I. Prescript (1:1-2).....	2
II. Thanksgiving, Encouragement, and Prayer (1:3-12).....	3
A. Appropriateness of thanksgiving for Thessalonians (1:3-4).....	3
B. Encouragement by truth of God's judgment (1:5-10).....	4
C. Prayer report (1:11-12)	8
III. Misunderstanding About Christ's Second Coming (2:1-12).....	8
A. Reassurance regarding false claim about Second Coming (2:1-3a).....	9
B. Rebuttal of false claim about Second Coming (2:3b-12).....	10
IV. Thanksgiving, Exhortation, and Prayer (2:13-17)	12
A. Thanksgiving (2:13-14)	13
B. Exhortation (2:15).....	14
C. Prayer (2:16-17).....	14
V. Prayer Request, Further Encouragement, and Prayer (3:1-5).....	14
A. Prayer request (3:1-2)	15
B. Encouragement (3:3-4)	15
C. Prayer (3:5).....	16
VI. Exhortation Regarding Idleness (3:6-15)	16
A. Command to avoid the idle (3:6).....	16
B. Missionaries' example of self-sufficiency (3:7-9)	17
C. Reminder of command previously given (3:10).....	17
D. Report about idlers (3:11)	17
E. Command to idlers (3:12).....	17
F. Encouragement of faithful (3:13).....	18
G. Renewal of command to avoid (3:14-15)	18
VII. Conclusion (3:16-18)	18
A. Prayer (3:16).....	18
B. Closing (3:17-18).....	18

Introduction to 2 Thessalonians

I. Reminder of Setting

A. Recall that Paul, Silas, and Timothy were steered by the Spirit to Troas and then sailed from there to Macedonia in response to a vision Paul had (Acts 16:6-10). In Philippi Paul and Silas were flogged illegally and thrown into prison (Acts 16:16-40). They then went to Thessalonica and planted the church to which the Thessalonian letters are written.

B. After planting the Thessalonian church, they were forced to flee to Berea (Acts 17:1-10), having spent at most a few months in the city. Paul's experience in Berea was similar to his experience in Thessalonica, so the brothers sent him off to Athens, where he was later joined by Silas and Timothy (Acts 17:11-16). Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1-2) and then rejoined Paul who had since moved to Corinth (Acts 18:5). Based on Timothy's news, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians.

II. The Letter

2 Thessalonians was written some months after 1 Thessalonians as a follow up pastoral letter. Paul's rebuttal in 1 Thessalonians of the slanderous attacks on the missionaries had apparently been successful, but some of the other problems needed further attention. Particularly, the problem of idleness persisted, and there were further misunderstandings about Christ's Second Coming.

The Text

I. Prescript (1:1-2)

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: ²grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. This is very similar to the greeting in 1 Thess. 1:1. The differences are that Paul here refers to the church of the Thessalonians "in God *our* Father," whereas in 1 Thess. 1:1 he wrote "in God [*the*] Father," and here he followed "grace to you and peace" with the phrase "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." God is the father of Christians in a distinct way, he is *our*

Father, and the blessings of grace and peace are from God and the Lord Jesus in that they are their source.

B. The phrase "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" is Paul's typical greeting. He writes the identical thing in Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; and Phlm. 1:3.

II. Thanksgiving, Encouragement, and Prayer (1:3-12)

³We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of each one of you all for one another is increasing, ⁴so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God because of your perseverance and faith in all your persecutions and the afflictions which you are enduring. ⁵[This is] evidence of the righteous judgment of God, so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you also are suffering, ⁶since it is a righteous thing in the presence of God to repay affliction to the ones afflicting you ⁷and rest to you (along with us) who are being afflicted. [This will happen] at the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸in flaming fire, when he metes out punishment to those who do not know God, those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹They will pay a penalty of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at by all who have believed [and therefore by you] because our testimony to you was believed. ¹¹To this end we also always pray concerning you that our God may count you worthy of the calling and may powerfully fulfill every desire of goodness and work of faith ¹²so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. Appropriateness of thanksgiving for Thessalonians (1:3-4)

1. The missionaries are bound to thank God regularly for the Thessalonians because their faith is flourishing and their love for one another is increasing. This is evidence of God's work among them, his granting the prayer of 1 Thess. 3:12. To fail to thank him in light of it would be to deny him his due honor.

2. And notice the breadth of this increasing love: the love of each one of you all for one another is increasing. They all were part of this work of God; love was a bond uniting the entire church. Given the emphasis in 1 Thessalonians that love be evident among them, this was no doubt a joyful thing for the Thessalonians to hear from Paul.

3. Of course, Paul is not suggesting that they have "arrived" in the sense they have no further room for growth in their faith and love. That will not be true until the Lord returns. Rather, his genuine praise is an implicit call for them to keep growing and increasing.

4. The missionaries are even boasting about them to other churches because this flourishing faith and the increasing love that accompanies it are happening as they persevere in the face of persecution and affliction. Note the reference to "all," indicating there were numerous incidents of persecution, and the clause "which you *are* enduring," indicating they are still experiencing them. This probably did not involve death or martyrdom, but rather took the form of social harassment, discrimination, and isolation.

B. Encouragement by truth of God's judgment (1:5-10)

1. Their flourishing faith and increasing love in the face of persecution is a sign of the reality of their faith and thus a marker that in the righteous judgment of God on the final day they will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which they are suffering, meaning they will enter into the rest of the consummated kingdom. The flip side of that righteous judgment is that those unbelievers who are persecuting them for their faith will be repaid with affliction, meaning they will be damned. God will vindicate his faithful people (see Rev. 6:9-11) (1:5-7a).

2. Large segments of the American church have cast the coming divine judgment as something negative, something that must be excused or apologized for, but that is a perversion. God's judgment is a good thing, a necessary thing, a thing for which the righteous long.

a. In an article last month titled, "[You Want a God of Judgment](#)," Derek Rishmawy noted that Frederick Douglass, the 19th-century abolitionist and former slave, recounted in his autobiography "the tragedy of his grandmother's death. After a lifetime of bondage and servitude to her masters, when she was too old to be of use to them, they callously sent her off to die alone, apart from her family." Douglass asked, "Will not a righteous God visit for these things?" Rishmawy continues:

[That question] continues to echo, though, for more than just the past injustices of American slavery. The crimes and atrocities reported by the 24-hour news cycle—the cycle that threatens to churn up our souls most days—lead me to turn this question over and over again in my mind.

Every headline I read about yet another sexual abuse victim coming forward, testifying to abuse by a major Hollywood mogul. Or worse, by the victim's famous youth pastor and the church who covered it up.

Will not a righteous God visit for these things?

Every victim of political injustice who makes the nightly news, both abroad and at home.

Will not a righteous God visit for these things?

Every report of a child who has been abused and traumatized in an immigration detention center for the last few years (despite the fact most of us are only hearing about it now).

Will not a righteous God visit for these things?

Every day abortion mills are open in America, *legally* ending the lives of thousands of unborn children—children never held, never loved, never even given the dignity of a name. Children we never think about because their lives are snuffed out behind closed doors in sterilized rooms with white-gloved hands.

Children known only to the all-seeing God.

Will not a righteous God visit for these things? . . .

[W]hile the strain of our anger-inducing media culture affects us all, there is at least one small benefit. We're finally in a place where we can see the goodness of David's praise: "God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day" (Ps. 7:11).

We're often told our culture doesn't want an angry God of judgment. This age can't abide any more teaching on a God full of wrath, who will prepare his weapons for battle with the unrepentant oppressors of God's people.

But I don't entirely buy that view. Not when I think of our rage. Not when I think of our righteous anger at injustice. In a world crooked and ruined with rebellion, I think deep down we all know we need a God who 'feels indignation every day.' We know it would be a greater tragedy if God never visited for these things. We would be terrified to discover he was an unrighteous judge who never condemned, never punished, never *dealt with the crimes of the world*—which is no judge at all."

b. N. T. Wright puts it this way in his book *Surprised By Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 137:

The picture of Jesus as the coming judge is the central feature of another absolutely vital and nonnegotiable Christian belief: that there will indeed be a judgment in which the creator God will set the world right once and for all. The word *judgment* carries negative overtones for a good many people in our liberal and postliberal world. We need to remind ourselves that throughout the Bible, not least in the Psalms, God's coming judgment is a good thing, something to be celebrated, longed for, yearned over. It causes people to shout for joy and the trees of the field to clap their hands. In a world of systematic injustice, bullying, violence, arrogance, and oppression, the thought that there might come a day when the wicked are firmly put in their place and the poor and weak are given their due is the best news there can be. Faced with a world of rebellion, a world full of exploitation and wickedness, a good God *must* be a God of judgment.

3. This judgment will happen at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven (1:7b-10).

a. Jesus is coming back from heaven (Jn. 14:2-3; Acts 1:10-11) accompanied by his mighty angels in flaming fire (see Mat. 24:29-31). His return will be no secret! Rather, when he returns in power and glory to consummate the kingdom he inaugurated at this first coming, his true identity will be visually and unmistakably revealed to the world. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day (Lk. 17:24).

b. At that time, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11). Some will do so in joyful spontaneity and others only in reluctant fear, but all beings will acknowledge his sovereignty. As Rev. 1:7, which combines Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10, sums it up: "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him." (So they should know that event has not already occurred as some claimed - see 2:2.)

c. At that time, he will mete out punishment to those who do not know God, who are described in the next clause as those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are not two separate groups but two parallel descriptions of the same group (see, e.g., Bruce, Wannamaker, Green).

(1) Jesus could not have been more direct when he said in Jn. 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." See also Peter's declaration in Acts 4:12. John states in 1 John 2:23, *Everyone who denies the Son also does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.*

(2) Green says in *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2002), 291, about the reference to obeying the gospel:

The NT frequently describes the act of conversion as obedience to the gospel (Acts 6.7; Rom. 1.5; 6.17; 10.16; 15.18; 16.26; Heb. 5.9; 1 Pet. 1.2, 14, 22). Such a description of the event cues us to the fact the gospel is both the promise and offer of salvation and the demand of obedience to its call. It calls humans to respond to the good news of God, but if the divine initiative is rejected, the very same gospel becomes the criteria by which God will judge the person (Rom. 2:16). . . . God calls humans through his gospel (2.14), and those who do not respond can only hope for judgment. In the divine scheme, disobedience to the gospel is elevated to the status of a criminal offense, a thought quite different from the modern notion that the gospel should be received simply for personal benefit.

d. The punishment is here described as eternal destruction, which means eternal damage or ruin not cessation of existence (for a fuller discussion, see [Does Scripture Teach the Annihilation of the Unsaved?](#)).

(1) This is evident from the fact Paul "elaborates the meaning of 'eternal destruction' with the idea of being separated from the presence of God" (Douglas J. Moo, "Paul on Hell" in *Hell Under Fire*, 108). As Michael Holmes explains in *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 214:

The second part of the sentence defines what he means by the first part: "everlasting destruction," that is, separation from the Lord's presence (for this phrase cf. Isa. 2:10, 19, 21, a judgment passage) and glory. In other words, Paul's definition of "destruction" (cf. 1 Thess. 5:3) here is precisely the opposite of his definition elsewhere of salvation as being with the Lord always (1 Thess. 4:17) and sharing in God's glory (Rom. 8:17-18), 30; 2 Cor. 4:7; Phil. 3:21).

(2) The fact "eternal destruction" is described as eternal deprivation of the Lord's favoring presence implies the eternal existence of those who are so deprived. Douglas Moo rightly notes (p. 108), "It makes little sense to describe people who have been annihilated as being separate from the presence of God." Scot McKnight comments in "Eternal Consequences or Eternal Consciousness?" in William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos, eds., *Through No Fault of Their Own* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 155-156:

Eternal separation from God is the essence of God's punishment on the wicked, as eternal fellowship with God is the essence of God's final deliverance of the faithful. But separation from God's presence must be defined as nonfellowship, not annihilation. In other words, it could be argued that since God is omnipresent, then banishment from his presence means extinction. It is more likely, however, that Paul has in mind an irreversible verdict of nonfellowship with God. A person exists but remains excluded from God's good presence.

e. Elsewhere that punishment is described as being thrown into a fiery furnace (e.g., Mat. 13:50), into a lake of fire (Rev. 14:9-11, 20:15), and into the darkness (e.g., Mat. 25:28-30). The description is often accompanied by the phrase, "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," so whatever the particulars, it is as bad as it gets.

f. At that time, Jesus will be glorified in his saints in the sense that sinful men and women will be presented redeemed and glorified through his sacrifice on the cross. We are the fruit of his work. He will be glorified *in* us because we will be glorified *with* him (see Rom. 8:17; Col. 3:4). He also will be marveled at by all who have believed (taking *en* here as "by" with NJB and CSB), which will include the Thessalonians (an ellipsis) because they believed the missionaries' message.

C. Prayer report (1:11-12)

1. In view of the Thessalonians' conversion, their having believed the missionaries' testimony, and in view of the greatness of Christ's work to which that conversion unites them, work that will culminate on "that Day" with his being glorified in them and marveled at by them, the missionaries are praying regularly for God to work powerfully that the Thessalonians might live worthily of the gospel they received. They are praying that God will bring to completion in the Thessalonians every desire motivated by goodness and every work spurred by faith.

2. In other words, they are praying for God to continue transforming the Thessalonians' lives so that the Lord Jesus, the one who achieved their salvation, will be glorified in them *now* as well as in the future. Living as a committed disciple of Jesus, especially in the face of opposition, glorifies him as it says he is worthy of allegiance, submission, and imitation. And genuine disciples are likewise glorified in him in that some people will respect and appreciate the quality of their character and their devotion to the Lord, and they ultimately will be glorified in the resurrection and final judgment as a result of being united with Christ (see Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 15:42-53; Col. 3:4).

3. The change for which they are praying is a matter of divine grace. Christians have a role to play in sanctification, a responsibility to yield to the working of the Spirit, but the transformation ultimately is his work. This is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in Rom. 8:13: For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

III. Misunderstanding About Christ's Second Coming (2:1-12)

Now, brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering to him, we ask ²that you not be quickly shaken from [your] understanding or disturbed, either by a spirit, or by a word, or by a letter to the effect that the day of the Lord has come, as if [that teaching came] from us. ³Let no one deceive you in any way, for [that day will not come] unless the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴the one who opposes and exalts himself over every being called god or object of worship, so that he takes a seat in the temple of God, proclaiming that he himself is God. ⁵Do you not remember that when I was still with you I was telling you these things? ⁶And you know what is now restraining [him] so that he will be revealed in his own time. ⁷For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, only [there is] now one restraining [it], until he is out of the way. ⁸And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing with the appearance of his coming. ⁹The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power and lie-promoting signs and wonders ¹⁰and with every deception of wickedness for those who are perishing because they did not accept the love of the truth so that they may be saved. ¹¹For

this reason, God sends them a working of delusion so they will believe the lie ¹²in order that everyone who did not believe the truth but delighted in unrighteousness will be condemned.

A. Reassurance regarding false claim about Second Coming (2:1-3a)

1. It seems that some time after receiving the first letter, some in the church in Thessalonica became confused and upset based on teaching purportedly from the missionaries that the Second Coming referred to in 1 Thess. 4:13 – 5:6 had already occurred. You can imagine them wondering, among other things, how they could have missed it and why they were still being persecuted. Paul and his companions somehow learned of this development, but they were not clear about how that claim had been conveyed to the Thessalonians. In this section, "Paul informs them it is impossible for the Day of the Lord to have already arrived because certain events and developments (which had not yet taken place) must first occur (2:3-12)" (Michael W. Holmes, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 228).

2. The puzzle is how the Thessalonians could have been distressed by a claim that was so clearly false. Weima states (p. 502), "After all, it would have been obvious to them that none of their fellow believers who had 'fallen asleep' had been resurrected (1 Thess. 4:14, 16), that 'sudden destruction' had not yet fallen on their unbelieving neighbors (5:3), and that there had been no cry of command, voice of an archangel, or 'trumpet call of God' to signal the glorious Parousia of Christ (4:16)."

3. I suspect the answer lies in their mistakenly believing that this teaching came from Paul and his companions. Perhaps some aspect of Paul's prior teaching was twisted in a way that got traction, or perhaps a false teaching from elsewhere was wrongly attributed to Paul. Either way, believing that Paul had now declared that the Second Coming had occurred would force them to reassess their understanding of his prior teaching. Maybe some harmonized this new information by concluding that Paul's earlier description of the Second Coming was intended in a purely spiritual or metaphorical sense. After all, there are a few people today who, for different reasons, claim the Second Coming has already occurred in some spiritual sense.

4. Paul is not sure how they were tracing this teaching to him, so he tells the Thessalonians not to be disturbed by any alleged prophecy (spirit), oral teaching (word), or letter that attributes to him the teaching that the day of the Lord has already come. If that is the substance of the report, he has been misrepresented; whoever makes such a claim is trying to deceive them. Michael Holmes states (p. 229):

For all that Paul knows (and it clearly isn't much), this misunderstanding may have arisen or come to the Thessalonians in one of three ways. It may have come (2:2) via a "prophecy" (lit., "a spirit"; i.e., presumably a prophetic utterance, perhaps spoken by one of the congregation or a visitor; cf. 1 Thess. 5:19-20), or a "report" (lit. "word"; i.e., a nonstatic spoken message or teaching), or a "letter"

(i.e., 1 Thessalonians, though the claim is so far removed from anything he actually taught that the possibility of a forged letter crosses his mind). But Paul's primary concern is not with how the claim reached them, but with its content (i.e., the claim that "the day of the Lord has already come"), which apparently has been attributed to him.

B. Rebuttal of false claim about Second Coming (2:3b-12)

1. In 1:7-10 Paul implicitly rebutted the claim that the day of the Lord had already occurred by making clear it will be an open display of the Lord's glory, a day in which the saints will marvel. Now he explicitly rebuts the claim by reminding them of what he had already taught them, namely that Jesus will not return until the rebellion and the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, is revealed. Since that had not occurred, the claim that Jesus had already returned was false.

2. The coming "man of lawlessness"

a. As I have explained in other classes, I believe Jesus taught in the Olivet Discourse (see, e.g., Matthew 24) that the time between his ascension and his return is one of birth pains – one of wars, conflicts, disasters, tumult, persecution, false prophets, and lawlessness – which will intensify, as birth pains do, and then ultimately give way to (give "birth" to) his return. A key figure in the final intensification of persecution and hardship for God's people will be the one depicted in Revelation 13 as the beast rising out of the sea, the one called Antichrist in 1 John (see esp. 1 Jn. 2:18). Paul's "man of lawlessness" is typically and rightly identified with that character.

b. The coming of this person was foretold as early as the book of Daniel in the 6th-century B.C. and was part of the common stock of early Christian teaching about end times. Paul reminds them in v. 5 that he told them these things when he was with them. And note how John says in 1 Jn. 2:18, "*as you have heard* that antichrist is coming, . . ." It was a teaching with which they were familiar. John says that *even now*, before the coming of the Antichrist they had heard about, many antichrists (plural) have come. John is referring to the false teachers of his day. They were "antichrists" in the sense they shared the spirit of *the* Antichrist (4:3), that spirit that opposes God and his Christ. This was evident from their denial of Jesus as the Christ (2:22; 2 Jn. 7).

c. Paul provides several pieces of information about this person, which when supplemented with information in Revelation, reveal that he is the ultimate, end-time opponent of God, the one who leads the final rebellion against God and his people and who draws people from God through deception.

(1) He is the Satan-inspired ruler of a powerful, worldwide, and violently antichristian empire (Rev. 12:9, 13:1-9, 17:11). His antichristian attitude is implicit in Paul's reference to "the rebellion" (the apostasy) and his description of him as the "man of lawlessness."

(2) He exalts himself as God and is worshipped by non-Christians throughout the world (Rev. 13:4-8, 12). As Paul says in v. 4, he opposes all competitors for worship and claims for himself the sole right to be worshiped. His taking a seat in the temple of God is best understood as a metaphor for proclaiming himself to be God and thus usurping the divine prerogative of worship (so Bruce, Marshall, Fee, Malherbe, Shogren, and Weima). Abraham Malherbe states in *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 421, "The usurpation of the temple of God as the locus for claiming himself to be God symbolizes the gravest act of deviance imaginable, and to express that is Paul's intention as he writes in starkly apocalyptic language."

(3) This worship is fostered by the performance of miracles through satanic power (Rev. 13:11-15, 16:14, 19:20). As Paul says in v. 9-10a, the coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power and lie-promoting signs and wonders and with every deception of wickedness.

(4) He is involved in organizing the nations for the final battle against God and his Christ (Rev. 16:12-16) and will be destroyed when the Lord returns (Rev. 16:15, 19:19-21). As Paul expresses it in v. 8, the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and bring him to nothing with the appearance of his coming.

d. Those who are deceived by the miracles that will be associated with this figure are those who did not love the truth. If they had loved the truth, they would not have believed the lie that Antichrist is divine (note 1 Cor. 12:3) regardless of what miracles were performed on his behalf. It is analogous to the case in Deut. 13:1-5. It is God's way of exposing those who really delighted in wickedness. Their true allegiance will be revealed in their rejection of Christ in response to the miracles.

e. Paul says that the timing of Antichrist's appearance is being controlled by the restraint another is putting on the mystery of lawlessness that is already at work. That restraint on the mystery of lawlessness is the "what" now restraining Antichrist's appearance in v. 6a; the "who" of v. 7b is the one restraining that mystery.

f. A "mystery" in biblical parlance is typically something that is "now hidden that would in time be revealed" (Fee, 288). I think Paul is referring to the spirit of lawlessness or rebellion against God and his Christ which, though already at work in the world, will one day be revealed with ultimate clarity in the person of Antichrist. He is saying in his own way what John later said in 1 Jn. 2:18: *even now*, before the coming of the Antichrist they had heard about, many antichrists (plural) have come. But that present mystery of lawlessness will

not be allowed to blossom into full revelation, into the person of Antichrist, until it is his time from God's perspective.

g. At some point, the one restraining the mystery of lawlessness will cease to do so, will move out of the way, and then the man of lawlessness will appear on the stage of history.

(1) I think Paul's point parallels what John says in Rev. 20:1-3. There Satan is bound in the sense he is prevented from deceiving the nations so as to prematurely gather them for the ultimate confrontation with God (Harmagedon). Revelation 20:3 specifically states that the reason for his binding is to prevent him from "deceiving the nations."

(2) Since miraculous power is the means by which Satan will ultimately deceive the nations into gathering against God (see, e.g., Mat. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9-10; Rev. 13:13-14, 16:14, 19:20), the binding more specifically represents the elimination of his power to perform nation-gathering miracles. That power will only be restored to him, i.e., he will only be "set free," when God chooses to bring this age to a close. The time of 1,000 years symbolizes the fullness of God's time (10 cubed). Satan will in no way "jump the gun" and thereby dictate the timing of the end; he will not be "released" until the precise moment God desires.

(3) This depriving Satan of the power to perform nation-gathering miracles until God's time for Antichrist's appearance is, I believe, what Paul refers to as restraining the mystery of lawlessness, keeping that obscure force in check, until the time for Antichrist's appearance when the nature of that lawlessness will be fully revealed. Since the one who binds Satan in Rev. 20:1-3 to prevent him from being able to perform nation-gathering miracles is an angel, I assume the one who restrains the mystery of lawlessness in 2 Thess. 2:7 until the time for Antichrist's appearance is an angel. Perhaps it is the angel Michael, a powerful spiritual being who plays an important leadership role in God's heavenly army and who in Jude 9 is identified as an archangel. It is interesting that Paul in 1 Thess. 4:16 mentions an archangel in conjunction with the Second Coming.

3. As I pointed out regarding 1 Thess. 5:1-2, Paul there confirms and reinforces their understanding that there is an element of unpredictability regarding the Second Coming; it will come like a thief in the night, meaning at an unknown time and with negative consequences for the unprepared. Here he emphasizes that certain events must precede the Second Coming to reassure the church that the event had not already occurred. Whatever signs may precede the Lord's return, they will not be such as to completely remove the element of unpredictability.

IV. Thanksgiving, Exhortation, and Prayer (2:13-17)

¹³But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because God chose you, the firstfruits, for salvation by sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴For this purpose he called you through our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions which you were taught, whether by our word or by our letter. ¹⁶And may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace, ¹⁷encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

A. Thanksgiving (2:13-14)

1. 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11 speaks of those who perish under the deception of Antichrist because they did not love the truth so that they may be saved. Condemnation is for those who did not believe the truth but delighted in wickedness. But the Thessalonians are not in that category. Rather than condemnation, God chose them (as he has chosen all Christians) for salvation, which he accomplishes through the sanctifying work of the Spirit in association with their belief in the truth.

2. Accepting the reading "firstfruits" in v. 13 rather than "from the beginning," I see it as a reference to the fact those to whom he is writing are the first Christians in Thessalonica. As with the offering of firstfruits at the temple, the idea is that they foreshadow a future, greater harvest.

3. The fact the Thessalonians are among the redeemed is cause for regular thanksgiving. God called them to salvation through the missionaries' gospel. That message is the means by which people are saved. That is the impetus behind evangelism.

4. The purpose of God's calling them through the gospel was that they may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Gary Shogren explains (p. 304):

"Glory" is a Pauline symbol of the final resurrection. Believers will enter glory in the kingdom (1 Thess 2:12); in the end they will glorify Christ but also be glorified by him (2 Thess 1:12; cf. Rom 8:30); glory is sought by the righteous (Rom 2:7); the saints hope for it (Rom 5:2; 8:17-23; 2 Cor 4:17; 2 Tim 2:10). As in 2 Thess 2, it is the goal of God's election and call (Rom 8:30). The resurrection body is a body of "glory" (1 Cor 15:40, 41, 43).

The genitive "of our Lord Jesus Christ" has two possibilities: source (Jesus will give you glory) or descriptive (glory like that which Jesus has). The parallel in that other Macedonian letter (Phil 3:21) suggests the second option: Christians will receive a body like his "glorious body" (see also Col 3:4).

B. Exhortation (2:15)

1. In light of what God has done for the Thessalonians, his blessing them through the gospel, a divine work that demands the missionaries' constant thanksgiving for the Thessalonians, Paul calls them to do right by God by standing firm through holding fast to the traditions they had been taught, meaning the divine truths the missionaries had passed on to them, truths that were standard, traditional teaching in the larger Christian community. He is exhorting them not to be easily shaken from that teaching, from basic orthodoxy, as 2:2 shows they were inclined to do regarding the Second Coming.

2. Those truths, that standard teaching about Christ's return, had been passed on to them both by the missionaries' word, their oral teaching (when they were in Thessalonica), and by their letter, a clear reference to 1 Thessalonians. Paul is admonishing them not to twist what they had been taught to force it to conform to some sketchy claim that he now was saying something inconsistent with that teaching. They need to trust the teaching that Paul and his companions had delivered to them and use that to judge contrary claims now purportedly coming from him instead of the other way around.

C. Prayer (2:16-17)

1. They pray that the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father will encourage their hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word. As in 1 Thess. 3:11, Paul again indicates both the distinction and the unity of Jesus and the Father, the latter by using singular verbs with the compound subject. They needed encouragement and strengthening in light of the alarm they had experienced over the false report that the Lord had already returned and as they pursued the Christian life in the face of a hostile populace.

2. The clause in v. 16b, "who loved us and gave us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace," probably refers to God the Father though it possibly refers to both Jesus and the Father (the singular participle being another expression of the unity of Jesus and the Father). This love was expressed most pointedly in the incarnation and the cross, which gracious gift provides for the faithful eternal encouragement or comfort and the good hope of eternal life in the glorious final state.

V. Prayer Request, Further Encouragement, and Prayer (3:1-5)

Furthermore, brothers, pray about us so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, as indeed it was with you, ²and that we may be delivered from evil and wicked men, for not everyone has faith. ³But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. ⁴And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are

doing and will do the things we command. ⁵May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the perseverance of Christ.

A. Prayer request (3:1-2)

1. Nearly all English translations render the opening words of v. 1 (*to loipon*) as "Finally," which suggests it is the very last topic of the letter. But as I said about 1 Thess. 4:1, the meaning of *loipon* is more flexible than that. It can function simply as a transition to something new, so I opted for "Furthermore," which is similar to the NIV's "as for other matters." Shogren suggests the translation "Beyond that."

2. The missionaries ask for prayers on their behalf. Shogren remarks (p. 315):

To Paul, one of the obligations that his disciples bore, having received the message of salvation from him, was that they pray for the gospel's advance into other areas (2 Cor 1:11; Eph 6:19-20; Col 4:3). People might also pray for other aspects of the apostles' work; for example, Paul asks the Romans to pray that he will be able to deliver the Jerusalem offering and then visit Rome (Rom 15:30-32); the author of Hebrews asks for prayers to be released from prison (Heb 13:18-19).

3. Specifically, they ask for prayers on their behalf so that the gospel ("word of the Lord") may spread rapidly and be glorified, as it was with the Thessalonians. The prayers are for the missionaries because God has chosen human instruments for the spread of his saving message. He does not directly instill knowledge of the gospel in people. All the conversions in Acts involve a human messenger (even Paul had Ananias come to him). God wants his gospel to go throughout the world (Mat. 28:18-20) and to be accepted by all people (1 Tim. 2:3-6; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Jn. 2:2), but he knows that many will reject it (Lk. 13:22-27; Mat. 7:13-14).

4. They ask for prayers that they may be delivered by God from evil and wicked men, specifically opponents of the gospel who persecute them as they evangelize. They did not want their gospel witness to be impeded.

B. Encouragement (3:3-4)

1. The Lord is faithful, to his word and to his disciples, so he can be counted on to strengthen them and to guard them from the assaults of Satan. This does not mean they will have no hardships; it means they will be protected during them. Satan cannot prevail against those who are faithful to Christ.

2. They express their confidence in the Lord's working in the Thessalonians' lives, that they are doing and will continue to do the things the missionaries command. This anticipates the exhortation regarding idleness in 3:6-15.

C. Prayer (3:5)

They pray that the Lord, referring to Jesus, will lead the Thessalonians into a growing appreciation of God's love for them (which will increase their love for him and for one another) and into an even greater participation in the endurance of Christ.

VI. Exhortation Regarding Idleness (3:6-15)

⁶Now we command you, brothers, in the name of [our] Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother walking in idleness and not according to the tradition which they received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you must imitate us, that we were not idle among you ⁸nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and toil we worked night and day so as not to burden any of you. ⁹This was not because we do not have the right [to such help], but in order that we may present ourselves to you as an example to imitate. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we commanded you that if anyone is unwilling to work, do not let him eat. ¹¹For we hear that some are living among you in idleness, not being busy at all but being busybodies. ¹²Now such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work with quietness and eat their own bread. ¹³But you, brothers, do not become weary in doing good. ¹⁴And if anyone does not obey our word in this letter, take note of this person so as not to associate with him in order that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵Yet, do not consider him an enemy but warn him as a brother.

A. Command to avoid the idle (3:6)

1. The missionaries had previously taught that, as Christians, they were not to live in idleness, not to be unwilling to work. They taught this both when they were with the Thessalonians (3:10) and in their prior letter (1 Thess. 5:14).

2. As I noted regarding 1 Thess. 5:14, the adjective ἄτακτος can have a general sense of being disorderly, unruly, or insubordinate, but there it probably carries the more specific nuance of being disorderly with respect to work, meaning being idle or lazy (Louw and Nida give the meaning "lazily"; see RSV, NRSV, NAB, ESV, NIV). The same is true here (and v. 11) regarding the related adverb ἀτάκτως (so too the verb ἀτακτέω in v. 7). The specific manifestation of "walking disorderly" that Paul has in mind is their insubordination regarding the

instructions to work and not sponge off the church. The translation brings that out (see also, RSV, NEB, REB, NRSV, NIV, and ESV).

3. Those who refused to accept this instruction were to be avoided. As explained in 3:14, the main purpose of this discipline was to shame the offenders into compliance. (Elsewhere we see it also serves to keep the church pure.)

4. The church cannot shrink from its God-given responsibility to discipline wayward members. Sin must be taken seriously in a community of believers. It is not "spiritual" to wink at sin; rather, it is an affront to God to treat sin, for which Christ died, as though it were no big deal! The Lord's charge against the church in Thyatira in Rev. 2:20 was that they tolerated a false prophetess, one who was misleading Christians into immorality and idolatry. 1 Corinthians 5 makes it abundantly clear that the church has an obligation (ultimately) to withdraw from the impenitent.

B. Missionaries' example of self-sufficiency (3:7-9)

The missionaries had set the example for the church by not sponging off them when they were in Thessalonica (see 1 Thess. 2:7, 9). They stayed, at least part of the time, in Jason's house (Acts 17:7), but they paid for what they were provided. They refused to become an economic burden on the converts, even though they had a right, as preachers of the gospel, to be supported by them (see 1 Thess. 2:7).

C. Reminder of command previously given (3:10)

When they were in Thessalonica, they commanded them that if anyone is *unwilling* to work, do not let him eat. Giving food to the one who is unwilling to work only feeds his sin; it enables him to continue in it. It is not the loving thing to do.

D. Report about idlers (3:11)

They had heard that, despite 1 Thess. 5:14, there were idlers among the Christians. With so much time on their hands, these idlers were acting as busybodies.

E. Command to idlers (3:12)

They are to work with quietness, meaning to work and to mind their own business (see 1 Thess. 4:11).

F. Encouragement of faithful (3:13)

Do not become weary in doing good. Those doing right are not to lapse into the type of conduct being condemned.

G. Renewal of command to avoid (3:14-15)

The idlers are now to be avoided. The only other use of this word "associate" (*sunanamignumi*) is in 1 Cor. 5:9, 11. Presumably the idlers have had ample opportunity to repent and have refused to do so.

VII. Conclusion (3:16-18)

¹⁶Now may the Lord of peace himself give peace to you at all times in every way. The Lord be with all of you. ¹⁷The greeting of Paul, in my own hand, which is a sign in every letter - I write in this way. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with all of you.

A. Prayer (3:16)

1. The prayer that the Lord of peace will give peace to them certainly is fitting on the heels of the instruction to discipline the lazy and meddlesome members of the church. Weima comments (p. 634), "[Paul] expects that his commands to discipline wayward members will cause internal tensions and thus prays in an emphatic manner that 'the Lord of peace' will 'give peace' to the Thessalonian congregation."

2. In adding "at all times in every way" the prayer looks beyond the disturbance likely to flow from the immediate instruction to the other disturbances of their peace alluded to in the letter. Weima states (p. 634), "The prayer for peace, therefore, also looks back to the readers' fear connected with the increased opposition that they endure from their fellow citizens (1:3-12) as well as the anxiety connected with the false claim about the day of Christ (2:1-17)."

3. The request for the Lord to be with them all is a request for his blessing on them all as they carry on the life of faith.

B. Closing (3:17-18)

1. Paul points out that he is appending a greeting to the letter in his own hand, as he does in 1 Cor. 16:21, Gal. 6:11, Col. 4:18, and Phlm. 19. The writing of the rest of it would have been done by a scribe (amanuensis). This may have extra significance here given the possible concern over a prior letter falsely claimed to have been from Paul.

2. His final words are an invocation of the Lord Jesus's grace on all of them. He closes the letter as he began it (1:2), with a desire for divine grace for the Thessalonians. Fee remarks (p. 342), "[Grace] is the one word in Paul's vocabulary that embraces all that God has done, and that he desires that God will do, for his Thessalonian friends through Christ Jesus."