



Sunday School Lesson for May 2, 2004.
Released on: April 30, 2004.

Study 2 Thessalonians 1:3,4,11,12. Reflecting His Glory
Questions and answers below.

TIME: A.D. 51
PLACE: from Corinth

2 Thessalonians 1:3, 4, 11, 12

3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.

.....
11 Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:

12 That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

13 But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-4

1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

3 But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

4 And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

Lesson Background

Born-again Christians should be continually thankful that God chose them to be saved and sanctified by the Holy Spirit and to believe the truth. He called them by means of the gospel to obtain glory by identifying themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul and His colleagues felt a sacred obligation to thank God for the faith, love, and patience under persecution displayed by the Thessalonian believers. They were in the habit of praying regularly that the Christians in Thessalonica would be worthy of the divine call that led them not only to salvation but also to works of faith that glorified the Lord Jesus Christ.

After pronouncing a blessing on believers in Thessalonica, Paul requested that they pray for him and his companions in their struggle with evil men. He trusted the Lord to keep those believers from evil and expressed his confidence that they were doing and would continue to do what he commanded them.

Thanksgiving and Prayer (2 Thessalonians 1:3,4,11,12)

1. What virtues did the Thessalonian believers display for which Paul thanked God (2 Thessalonians 1:3)?

In saying that he and his colleagues were bound to thank God always for the brethren in Thessalonica, Paul was giving credit where it belonged. God was the one who had brought about their conversion to Christ and growth in grace in their lives, and Paul felt a holy obligation to praise Him for this.

The faith that God had generated in the converts in Thessalonica had flourished exceedingly. Their love for one another abounded, no doubt both in words and in deeds. As a result, Paul and others spoke highly of the Thessalonian believers in all the churches they visited.

2. Thinking about Paul's example, what obligation do we have to thank and praise our fellow Christians? How might their growth depend on our doing those two things?

Everyone should be recognized and honored for his or her faithful service, especially children and new Christians. We can have a tremendous ministry of encouragement to other believers by well-timed words of gratitude and praise.

At times, ingratitude can be not only bad manners, but sin (Luke 17:16-18; 2 Timothy 3:2). A lack of feedback, especially from church leaders, can lead others to think their service doesn't really matter. On the other hand a spirit of thanks and praise from church leaders will serve to channel the Christian growth of others as it says, "This is what is important."

3. What did the believers endure while displaying these virtues (v. 4)?

Paul and his colleagues were especially thankful for the fact that the Thessalonians maintained their patience, or endurance, and their faith in Christ in the doctrines

they had been taught. They were able to do this in spite of persecutions and tribulations from unbelievers.

Paul went on to say that those who persecuted the Thessalonian believers would someday have to face the fierce vengeance of the Lord Jesus when He returns to punish sinners and to reward His followers (2 Thess. 1:5-10). This led up to his second prayer.

4. What were some of the results of the Thessalonians' suffering through persecutions?

Suffering through persecutions from others along with various tribulations (trials) has become the soil in which the Thessalonians' faith has taken root. Such difficulties could have been a threat to their faith. Instead, suffering has made their faith grow stronger. Compared to their difficult circumstances, their faith stands out all the more! God is often best glorified in circumstances that seem most difficult.

The Thessalonians' suffering prompts Paul to remind them of something: God promises to punish those who refuse to repent of their opposition to Him and His people (see 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, not in today's text). But God's judgment is not His only response to His people's suffering. His other response is His promise to strengthen them. Paul counts on that promise as he explains his prayers for the Thessalonian Christians in verses 11, 12 (next).

5. Why was the calling from God a high honor and privilege (vs. 11,12)?

Paul said that he and his colleagues prayed always that the believers in Thessalonica would be counted worthy by God of His calling of them through the gospel (vs. 11; 2:14). This calling was the highest honor and privilege anyone could ever experience, for it determined one's eternal destiny.

The Thessalonians, like all Christians, had been called by God through the good news of Jesus to belong to Him forever (see 1 Thessalonians 2:12). Persecution and suffering might make believers think that God had abandoned them since they had received their calling. But Paul knows that God does no such thing. God's purpose is to make His people His forever. He will see that purpose through to its end.

Like most Christians, the Thessalonians may be troubled by their own sense of failure and unworthiness. Paul prays not that they actually will be worthy of God's call (which is impossible), but that God will "count" them "worthy." God's favor does not come by merit, and no one can earn it. But by His grace God promises to treat those with faith in Christ as if they are worthy, despite the fact that they are sinners. Being counted worthy is the foundation of all of God's work in the lives of His people.

What happens when Christians cooperate with God in what He is doing in their lives? "Christ" is "glorified" (2 Thessalonians 1:12). When Christ returns, His glory will be seen by all (v. 10). In the meantime, His glory is to be seen in the lives of people transformed in His image and living out their calling by His power.

Saved and Holding Fast to the Teachings (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17)

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (not in our text for today), Paul has been discussing the ongoing problem of evil in the world. Now he shifts gears to focus again on the people of God, who have been saved from that evil. He repeats his thanksgiving from the beginning of the letter, again saying that he has an obligation to thank God

despite what seems like bad circumstances. Those circumstances do not lessen Christ's love for His family, even though they sometimes make His love difficult to see.

6. What did Paul mean when he "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation" (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14)?

Being "beloved" by Christ and being "chosen" by God are different expressions of the same essential idea in this verse. Both mean that Christians belong to God and can depend on His power to see them through to the end. However, it is important to understand the relationship between our faith and God's choosing. God does not choose people and then cause them to believe as a result of being chosen. Rather, it's the other way around: He chooses people to be with Him for eternity because they believe. We are saved through belief in the truth.

Second Thessalonians 2:13 should be studied in connection with Romans 8:28-30. God calls all believers whom He "foreknew," He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. (Also see Ephesians 2:10).

7. What did Paul mean when he spoke of "sanctification of the Spirit"?

Paul told the Thessalonians that God chose them to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. It was the Holy Spirit who set converts apart from sin and unto righteousness, and that is the basic meaning of the term "sanctification." It was belief in the truth of the gospel that made this possible. While here "sanctification" probably refers to God's work of setting the believer apart positionally at the moment of salvation (1 Cor. 6:11), it is also used for the process of setting one apart to God in holiness that takes place throughout a Christian's life.

Note that Paul said believers in Thessalonica had been called by the gospel brought to them by the missionaries themselves (verse 14 in our text). There were evidently other so-called gospels circulating in the first century. This caused John to write, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 1:10,11).

8. Where had believers obtained the truths they were to hold (v. 15)?

Another interesting technical term is the word traditions, which comes from a verb meaning "to hand down by tradition." The term "traditions" used here might be misunderstood by some people who recall that Jesus had harsh words for the scribes and Pharisees, who made the commandment of God of no effect by their tradition (Matt. 15:6; Mark 7:13). Paul, however, used the term to refer to truths the missionaries had taught the Thessalonians.

The content of the teaching and preaching of the apostles was the gospel, and Paul is saying here that it makes no difference whether these traditions were given orally (by word) or in written form (our epistle). Either way, this teaching, preaching, or tradition, is the Word of God and is authoritative (KJV Parallel Bible Commentary).

Counting on God's Provision (vs. 16, 17)

"Holding fast" is a tough assignment when the world is filled with evil. So Paul moves quickly from his command to hold fast to a confident prayer for God's help to overcome in the struggle.

Paul begins this prayer by mentioning Christ emphatically. Doing so helps us understand how God helps us hold fast. If Christ endured the cross for our salvation, He can certainly provide what we need to endure opposition and hold firm to the gospel.

9. How may everlasting consolation, good hope, and grace be defined (vs. 16,17)?

The source of comfort for believers rests in two Persons of the Godhead. The Lord Jesus Christ is one, and God the Father is the other. God is characterized as having loved us and having given us "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." Let us take a closer look at these terms.

"Everlasting consolation" refers to everlasting comfort or unending courage and encouragement. "Good hope" is that which is well-founded and firm. God's love was shown when these blessings were bestowed on believers through the grace of God. "Grace" is generally defined as unmerited favor. This suggests that believers do not de-serve spiritual blessings. Their only claim to them rests on their identification by faith with the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord of their lives.

Jesus and His heavenly Father have an inexhaustible supply of comfort to dispense to believers. No matter how difficult situations may become, they can establish their children in "every good word and work" (v. 17), and this is what Paul prayed for the Thessalonians. Christians can expect to be given grace to endure trials, and they can expect deliverance from trials. Sometimes that deliverance comes in this life, but the ultimate deliverance is found in exiting this life and entering into eternal life.

As believers, we have been "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). In other words, believers have works to do that God has already foreordained for them to do. They should not be slack about those works or expect other people to do them. They should ask God to settle them firmly in what they say and do and then trust Him to make them effective.

Pray for the Message and Deliverance
(2 Thessalonians 3:1-4)

10. What prayer request did Paul make to the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 3:1,2)?

As Paul came to the closing part of his second letter to the Thessalonians, he requested that his readers pray for him and his companions. He wanted the word of the Lord to flow freely wherever the missionaries were able to go (v. 1). He wanted God's truth to receive the glory and honor that it deserved, just as it had done when it came to Thessalonica and was well received by the believers there.

We need to be concerned about the spread of the gospel in our time as well. There are many adversaries to it, just as there were in Paul's time (1 Cor. 16:9; Phil. 1:28). There are the higher critics, who want to tear the Bible apart. There are non-Christian religions and cults, which favor their own writings over the Bible. There are legalists, who want to place their man-made rules and regulations above the Scriptures. There are the atheists and secularists, who want to get rid of revealed truth.

Paul asked the Thessalonian believers to pray that he and his companions would be delivered from the trouble caused by "unreasonable and wicked men" (2 Thess. 3:2). These were men who did not have experiential knowledge of the Christian faith. It is customary for people to fear or dislike what they do not understand, and this can often lead to persecution of those who propose new teachings. The ancient pagan world was not a friend to grace, and neither is the modern pagan world. Paul faced his share of opposition, and we can expect to encounter our share too.

11. Again, we see the importance of prayer for Paul. If we don't pray for our church leaders, church members, and church programs, then how much of the blame is ours when they fail?

We do bear at least some guilt when a church leader, member, or program fails if we haven't prayed for the person or function. Prayer for people and programs is not the last step but the first. Leaders make better decisions, teachers teach better lessons, and programs run more smoothly when they are lifted up in prayer. Prayer recognizes that there is a God, and we need His help. Perhaps our first prayer right now could be one that asks for forgiveness in failing to pray!

12. In what way did Paul expect God to keep the Thessalonians from evil (vs. 3,4)?

Confidence in prayer comes from knowing the faithfulness of God. Many people do not have faith, but God is always "faithful." He will always deliver His people and see His purpose through to its end.

Paul expresses this confidence in a way that reminds us how God proves Himself faithful. He will keep His people from evil, not by removing them completely from its presence (until Christ returns), but by enabling them to overcome evil by His strength.

Paul was confident that the Christians in Thessalonica were going to continue doing the things the missionaries had commanded them to do (v. 4).

Paul has good reason to be confident about the Thessalonian Christians. Despite persecutions, they have held to their faith.

But Paul's ultimate confidence is in God Himself. God has been at work in the Thessalonian Christians in the past, strengthening them to bring Him glory. He has been with Paul in the past, enabling him to proclaim the gospel and bring God glory. He was faithful to His Son, Jesus Christ, raising Him from the dead. He has always been faithful to all of His people. We can count on Him now. We can count on Him in the future. We can count on Him forever.

Our attention is drawn to 2 Thessalonians 3:6-"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." Paul then went on to mention that when the missionaries had been in Thessalonica, they had not been disorderly. They had not eaten anyone's bread for nothing but had worked night and day to support themselves. They had taught that anyone who would not work should not eat (vs. 7-10).

Paul then became quite specific. Noting that some among the believers in Thessalonica were disorderly, not working at all but being busybodies, he commanded and exhorted them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to work and eat their own food. If any man did not obey this command, he was to be noted and shunned so that he might be ashamed; however, he still was to be counted as a brother rather than an enemy (vs. 11-15).

Paul ended his letter with a brief benediction and his customary hand-written salutation (vs. 16-18).

CONCLUSION

Reflecting His Glory

Even as God's people, our faith sometimes fails. We struggle with sin at times. Some believers succumb to the pressures of the world and forsake the Lord altogether. Demas was just such a one—he even went to Thessalonica! (See 2 Timothy 4:10).

Yet God is glorified when His people live out their faith, even imperfectly. He continues to change them and strengthen them so that they reflect His glory more and more. At Christ's return, He will glorify them with His Son. When we know what God is doing and where He is taking us, we will be ready to reflect His glory more clearly until Christ comes again.

PRAYER

Dear Father, help us to hang on! (by the power of the Holy Spirit) When the world distracts us, teach us to lift our eyes to eternity. May we be Yours forever. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Our next lesson takes us to the book of Revelation, where we will share John's vision of the Lamb. Study background Scripture: Revelation 4,5.

May the Lord continue to bless you !

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