



# Life Group Study Guide

Spring/Summer 2017



## 2 Thessalonians

The message of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians is that amid suffering, believers must remember the sovereign grace that has rescued them in Jesus Christ.

Everything in 2 Thessalonians contributes to these twin themes of endurance through suffering and the eternal scope of divine grace.

# 2 Thessalonians Overview



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## 2 Thessalonians Chapters 1-3

Study 1	Chapter 1:1-12	The Judgment
Study 2	Chapter 2:1-12	The Man of Lawlessness
Study 3	Chapter 2:13-17	Standing Firm
Study 4	Chapter 3:1-5	A Model of Prayer
Study 5	Chapter 3:6-18	A Theology of Work

**2 Thessalonians** reflects on who Christ is and how His coming has affected human history (2 Thess. 1:5–7; 2:1–2, 13). Paul directs his readers to the future and to the past, reminding them of their affect on the present.

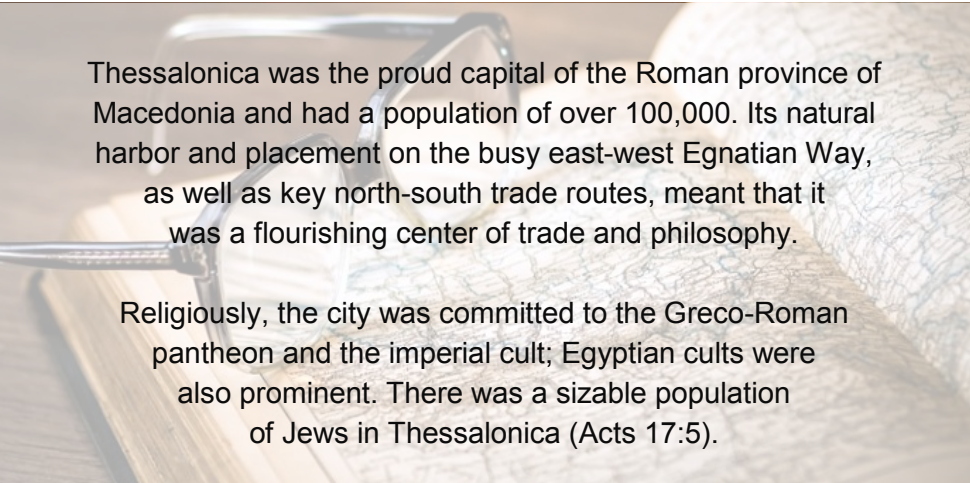
**The future** As was true of 1 Thessalonians, the second coming of Christ is of particular importance in 2 Thessalonians. Again, Paul is lifting his readers' eyes to the future horizon when their present suffering will come to an end. God will "grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven" (2 Thess. 1:7). Jesus will be worshipped and praised in that day, and His enemies will suffer the horrific fate of righteous condemnation before God (1:5–12).

**The past** As in 1 Thessalonians, it is not only the future that is in view. Paul directs his readers also to eternity past. He reminds them that "God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved" (2 Thess. 2:13). God's steadfast love for His people stretches back to even before the dawn of time (Eph. 1:4–5, 11). We therefore have "eternal comfort and good hope through grace" (2 Thess. 2:16).

**The present** All of this affects the way believers live in the present. If we have been chosen by undeserved grace, and if we are destined to be vindicated gloriously when Jesus comes again, then we are strengthened to endure adversity (2 Thess. 1:4). We stand fast against the evil one (2:15; 3:3). We persist in well-doing (1:11; 3:13).

## About Thessalonica:

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Thessalonica was the proud capital of the Roman province of Macedonia and had a population of over 100,000. Its natural harbor and placement on the busy east-west Egnatian Way, as well as key north-south trade routes, meant that it was a flourishing center of trade and philosophy.

Religiously, the city was committed to the Greco-Roman pantheon and the imperial cult; Egyptian cults were also prominent. There was a sizable population of Jews in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5).

## About the Author:

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Paul penned 2 Thessalonians from Corinth just before his third missionary journey and shortly after his first letter. Paul and his companions, Timothy and Silvanus, had recently established the church in Thessalonica.

## Prayer:

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Through this study of Paul's letter to Thessalonica, it is our prayer that God will stir in you a greater devotion to Him and that you will live a resolved life committed to following His Word while expectantly looking toward Jesus' return.

# The Judgment

## 2 Thessalonians Chapter 1:1-12

### Study #1

#### Justice at Christ's Return

As in his previous letter to the Thessalonians, Paul speaks throughout this letter of the second coming of Jesus. In 2 Thessalonians, however, the focus is specifically on the judgment of God's enemies that will take place on that day. This emphasis is perhaps because of the persecution the Thessalonian believers were experiencing (2 Thess. 1:4–5; note Acts 17:1–9).

Paul says, therefore, that

### JESUS WILL APPEAR "IN FLAMING FIRE"

inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction (2 Thess. 1:8–9). This cosmic judgment will extend to every corner of creation, including all people groups and tribes who have not bowed their knee to Jesus Christ.

#### Chapter 1:1-4

While Timothy and Silas are included as co-senders, Paul is the main author as noted in 2:18 and 3:5. It is typical for Paul to include a word of thanksgiving and encouragement in the beginning of his letter.

- ✓ How do you think the church in Thessalonica felt in hearing from their mentor and spiritual leader Paul for a second time?
- ✓ Paul gives a shout out to the church in Thessalonica for what two fundamentals of Christian living? What descriptive words does he use?
- ✓ For those in Thessalonica, what area of their faith do you think was rattled the most because of their persecution/affliction?

### FUNDAMENTALS

**FAITH:** relying on Jesus and His Word **LOVE:** Putting others needs before your own

**Personal Look:** If your spiritual mentor were to write you a letter today, how would they exhort/encourage you in your practices of faith and love?

## Opposition to Christ

Why were Christians being persecuted? The fact that Christians worshipped only one God excluded them from participation in community gatherings which often focused on other gods. The church's custom of meeting secretly also raised suspicions of disloyalty to the Roman Empire.

### Chapter 1:5-12

The Thessalonians' endurance and ability to stand firm in persecution is solely granted by the grace of God. Paul wants the Thessalonians to know that they are not alone in their suffering for Christ and that God's judgment will be more than fair during Christ's second coming.

- ✓ Take a moment to talk about God's justice. How is God's judgment fair?
- ✓ For the unbeliever they will suffer a great loss, how is that described in vs. 8-9?
- ✓ As you consider the lost, is this difficult to hear? Why is it important for the believer to understand God's judgment?



**Word Study:** "Vengeance" to be held to what is just, to satisfy God's holy law. Not to be confused with revenge.

In the second coming, Jesus' return to earth with His church and His angels (2 Thess 1:7) is not the same event as the rapture described by Paul in 1 Thess 4:13-18.

#### 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Christ returns in the air  
He comes secretly for the church  
Believers escape the tribulation  
Occurs at an undisclosed time

#### 2 Thessalonians 1:7

Christ returns to the earth  
He comes openly with the church  
Unbelievers experience the tribulation/judgment  
Occurs end of trib. period, the day of the Lord.

### Evaluate and Discuss

- ✓ Some have the idea that when we suffer it means that God does not care— what do they use to support that theory? What are the flaws in that logic?
- ✓ What are the promises of God that you hold to during difficult times?

# The Man of Lawlessness

## 2 Thessalonians Chapter 2:1-12

### Study #2

In Paul's first letter to the young church in Thessalonica, he affirmed the expectant heart a believer should have regarding the coming of the Lord- 1 Thess 5:1-11. Yet now there seemed to be a false notion spreading that the day of the Lord had arrived already (2:1-2). Here we see Paul refute the false claim as he reassured the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord had not yet come.

Paul first points out that, before Christ's return, a final rebellion and the revelation of the "man of lawlessness" must occur (2:3-12). Then he reassures the Thessalonians that they are destined for glory and calls on them to hold firm to the traditions he has passed on to them.

### Chapter 2:1-2

The Thessalonians were shaken. The source of their confusion was unknown, but was possibly a spirit or prophetic word, a word of teaching or sermon, or a letter seeming to be from Paul. There was a genuine panic and alarm that the day of the Lord had already come.

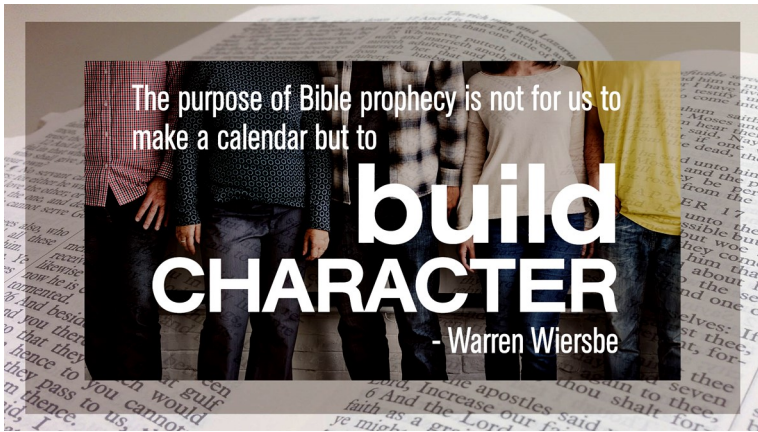
- ✓ Are disciples to believe every teaching, book or notion on Christian living they read? How can the believer distinguish between great Christian notions and the Living Word of God?
- ✓ What could those in Thessalonica have done better in order not to be deceived? What had Paul written them regarding this in a previous letter?

In our culture there seems to be a **Word "plus"** mindset that the church has struggled with; where the Word of God is no longer sufficient and believers are deceived by alluring notions alongside of the Word of God. Read Paul's instruction to Timothy while he was in Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3-7).

- ✓ What were some of the Word "plus" notions those in Ephesus struggled with?
- ✓ How do those things you identified relate to our culture today?



The Lord warned us not to set dates for His coming (Matthew 24:36,42).



- ✓ What events does Paul mention in vs 3-4 as evidence that Jesus had not yet returned? What do you know about these events?
- ✓ What is God's ultimate purpose in allowing the "man of lawlessness" to deceive people? What will ultimately happen to this figure (vs 8)?
- ✓ According to vs 9-10, how does the "man of lawlessness" contrast to Jesus?
- ✓ What is the warning for us from these verses?

## Evaluate and Discuss

- ✓ Why are many Christians today confused about Christ's return? What ideas confuse them most?
- ✓ In what ways do you see our society becoming more and more vulnerable to deception by fabricated signs and wonders?
- ✓ How can you live expectantly? What might that look like in practice this week?

# Standing Firm

## 2 Thessalonians Chapter 2:13-17

### Study #3

#### Key Themes:

- Chosen for salvation and sanctification (vs 13)
- Called to live as disciples of Jesus (vs 14)
- Stand firm in teachings and traditions (vs 15)
- Establish a life in good works and words (vs 17)

Paul reassured the Thessalonians that, in contrast to the unbeliever (v 10-12), they had been chosen by God for salvation and sanctification. The supreme call of their lives was to bring joy to God through being disciples, thus calling them to stand firm in Jesus' instruction (God's Word) and live lives dedicated to His work and words.

**Salvation** begins the moment one comes to faith in Jesus Christ. To begin this journey costs us nothing. There is no amount of good works we could do to earn this life with Jesus; no moral standard, no spiritual ladder, no special ceremonies, absolutely nothing we can do begins this journey with Christ. We enter into this spiritual relationship with Him by faith alone. Paul, in his letter to Ephesus (2:8-9), reminds us all, "For grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Salvation is truly God's greatest work!

**Sanctification** is the life-long journey of following Christ that costs us everything. There is nothing off limits in our lives when it comes to following Jesus Christ. It will cost us the things we hold closest, the relationships we treasure most, and for some, it will even cost their life. The one who issues the call sets the terms of following Him. "Therefore, anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33). For the one who follows Christ, He must be our first priority and our most fervent passion. "Who you are determines what you do."

### Chapter 2:13-14

Paul's reminder to those in Thessalonica was to remember **who they were!** The church in Thessalonica was among the "firstfruits" to receive the good news of Jesus Christ. These early believers were hand-picked by God to receive the gospel in its fullness to become an example to other churches in the area.



- ✓ How do you imagine the believers in Thessalonica benefited from the reminder that they were chosen and called by God? How can we benefit from this reminder today?
- ✓ What do verses 13-14 remind you about God? How do we see the Trinity at work in these verses?
- ✓ Once we come to faith, what means does God use to establish us in His truth?

## Chapter 2:15-17

Paul's reminder to those in Thessalonica was to remember who they were should determine **what they do!** A disciple is dedicated to the priorities of God. Here, Paul reminds the early church to stand firm in their identities as disciples- holding closely to the teachings of God, both His works and His Word!

- ✓ What teachings/traditions were those in Thessalonica to stand firm in?
- ✓ How would you restate these verses in your own words?
- ✓ What else does Paul remind us regarding God and His work in our lives through these verses? Why must we remember these things in light of Christ's promised return?

**A Disciple** is one who knows Jesus, follows Him, grows in Him and goes to serve in His mission



## Evaluate and Discuss

- ✓ Discuss who we are as disciples of Christ. How does “who we are” impact “what we do”?
- ✓ What makes standing firm in your faith difficult for you? What tools has God given us to help preserve our faith in the midst of difficulty?
- ✓ What do you think enables believers to be ready to stand before the Lord without fear or shame at His return?

# A Model of Prayer

## 2 Thessalonians Chapter 3:1-5

### Study #4

#### Key Themes

- Praying for our spiritual leaders (v 1-5)
- Centrality of the Word of God (vs 1)
- Standing firm in persecution (vs 2-3)
- Resolved living in obedience (vs 4-5)

Paul's missionary letters are filled with sincerity and sentiment as he longs for the early church to be established in their faith. Imagine, he has dedicated his very life, even to his last breath, to preaching Christ and seeing the church founded.

These verses are a glimpse into Paul's heart of hearts as he asks for personal prayer for himself and his missionary team. His request fell on the shoulders of those who understood and shared his struggle. In that time, Christ and His teachings were met with resistance and instant persecution. Stopping the works of Christ and the Word of God from spreading, was Satan's top priority and he would use any means necessary to foil any Christian effort (vs 3).

Paul's request for prayer quickly shifts back to the needs of those in Thessalonica. The burden of carrying the message of Christ would come at a cost to many of them, and in order not to live a life of compromise, they would have to be committed to Christ's teachings and have a heart set on the steadfastness of Christ (vs 5).

### Chapter 3:1-2

**For not all have faith.** This is a sobering reminder that many people will live their entire life having heard the gospel and yet will not respond. Many of these people will be people we love dearly. This thought alone is the burden many believers will carry and the thing that will come to spur us on in our own gospel efforts.

- ✓ What specifically did Paul ask the early church to pray for him and his team about?
- ✓ What does Paul mean when he asks for the Word of the Lord to "speed ahead" and to be "honored"?
- ✓ What do you imagine Paul was referring to in asking for prayer to "be delivered from wicked and evil men"?
- ✓ What does Paul's prayer in verses 1-2 show us about his relationship with the Thessalonian believers?

## CHALLENGE

Why is it important we pray for our spiritual leaders and their ministry efforts? This week reach out to a spiritual leader in your life and ask them how you can pray for them and their ministry.

### Chapter 3:3-5

## ... but the Lord is faithful

This truth should be the top priority in every believer's life. No matter the depth of darkness that prevails; or how far the Christian stumbles; or how much doubt creeps in- God is always faithful! Faithful to forgive. Faithful to restore. Faithful to make sense out of our mess.



- ✓ How does Paul expand on God's faithfulness in verses 3-5?
- ✓ How is Jesus, Himself, a reminder to us of God's faithfulness?

### Evaluate and Discuss

- ✓ How has God demonstrated His faithfulness in your life? How might remembering this help you rely more fully on Him?
- ✓ How often do you pray that God's Word would "speed ahead and be honored?" How might praying this way help you be more deliberate in your relationships with lost people?

# A Theology of Work

## 2 Thessalonians Chapter 3:6-18

### Study #5

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Paul knew all too well that church problems were like physical problems- if left unsolved, they'd grow and become worse and infect more people. In his first letter, Paul warned the new church to stick to God's Word and not be idle busybodies (1 Thess 4:11).

*"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward." Colossians 3:23-24*

God's Word teaches us a lot about the value of our labor. Did you know that labor was part of man's life *before* sin entered into his life? God had given Adam the job of dressing and guarding the garden (Gen 2:15). It was with sin that labor turned into a hopeless effort (Gen 3:17-19).

The Jews knew this and valued honest labor. However, the Greeks despised manual labor and often left it to their slaves. This influence, combined with the wrong idea of the Lord's return, began to mislead many of the young Christians within the church.

### Chapter 3:6

It is likely that some had misinterpreted Paul's teachings on the return of Christ, had left the church, and were living off of the generosity of the Church. Misinterpretations of the truths of God's Word caused endless troubles.

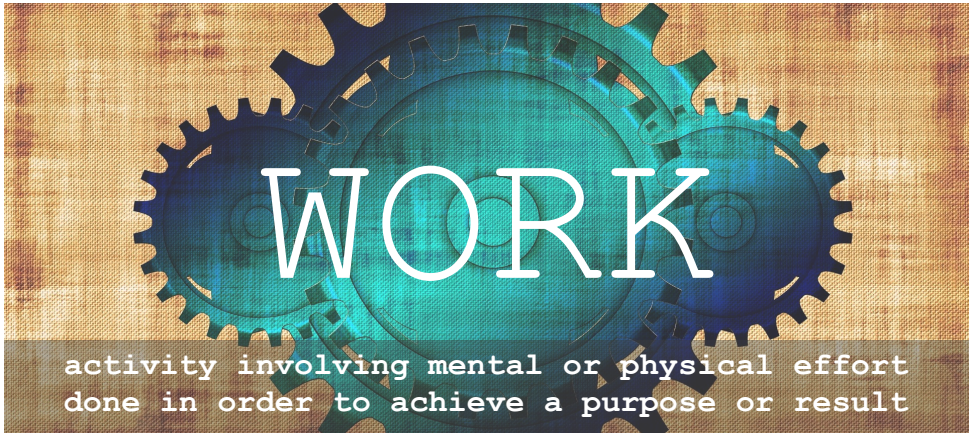
- ✓ Paul uses the powerful word *command*, to exhort those in Thessalonica in God's Word. What authority did Paul have to give such commands?
- ✓ Any teaching that encourages us to disobey another scripture teaching is not Bible teaching. Why is it important to embrace this truth?

### Chapter 3:7-9

In every city there were teachers who "peddled" the Word of God, fishing for followers by hooking them in with crafty teachings to then later consume them (2 Cor 2:17). However, this was not the case with Paul and his missionary team! As we read, his team would not take any support from the infant Church, but instead set an example in sacrifice and godly living.

- ✓ What was Paul's approach to work? What kind of example did he leave for the Thessalonians in this regard?

- ✓ What do you think motivated Paul to do excellent work? What can we learn from his example?
- ✓ Why does it matter how we conduct ourselves at work? What do we communicate to our co-workers when we give into idleness?



## Chapter 3:10-15

Paul believed it was very possible that some would ignore his warning and continue in their idle ways, so he instructed the community as a whole to take note of such people and have nothing to do with them. The purpose of this disassociation was the hope they would be ashamed, repent and be restored to the community.

- ✓ What commands did Paul give to the early church?
- ✓ What makes it difficult to confront a fellow church member about a problem or conflict, even though that is how the Bible teaches us to handle it?
- ✓ How do we discipline someone gently and for the purpose of restoration?

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## Evaluate and Discuss

- ✓ Paul expected the whole church to work together in solving its conflict. How does this compare to the way churches solve their conflicts today?
- ✓ What step might you take this week to begin approaching your daily tasks with a gospel-centered perspective?

Prayer Requests /Notes

Date

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# Tips for studying 2 Thessalonians

**Read** the chapter/verses a couple days before hearing the message

**Listen** Catch our weekly teaching (live, online or SCC app)

**Apply** Discuss and grow your faith with a group of other believers

**Check Out** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbPBDKOn1cc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbPBDKOn1cc)

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## Getting Into a Life Group

[wearescc.org/life-groups](http://wearescc.org/life-groups)

1. Consider attending a Group Link event for more info
2. Check out the Life Group finder online
3. Complete an inquiry form on Sunday or online

Need more help? Email Pastor John at [jdoty@wearescc.org](mailto:jdoty@wearescc.org)



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