

No.20, 2 Thessalonians

As we analyse Paul's epistles it is discovered that there were two churches that received two epistles each – the church at Corinth and the church at Thessalonica. The inference of such a detail is that there were particular issues of a most pressing or urgent nature with respect to these two churches. As noted when dealing with the Corinthian epistles, there certainly were matters of the most momentous kind in the church there; and this is also certainly true as far as the Thessalonian church is concerned, the issue being that of the 2nd coming of Christ.

We noted in last week's study that one of the reasons why Paul wrote 1st Thessalonians was in order to deal with certain problems concerning the subject of Christ's return. This second letter now reveals that there some foolish ideas about the subject of Christ's return that lingered on in the Thessalonian church – a very striking fact. When some error creeps in among the Lord's people it is often the case that it is very difficult to purge them out of their minds. The danger of such a situation is that Satan needs very little in order to hurt the work of a good church such as was found in Thessalonica.

Note ch 1: 3 & 4 to see the proof that this was a good church, displaying remarkable spiritual growth, while they stood fast against great persecution. Yet simultaneously many of these believers at Thessalonica were disturbed greatly by groundless teaching on this matter of Christ's return. Note ch 2: 2a – the words literally read “shaken out of the mind” and all because of wild theories about the Lord's coming; a situation that still prevails in many places to this very day. However, as noted this epistle was designed to deal with this issue of the ongoing confusion about Christ's coming, confusion that was being created by those who were essentially enemies of Paul. Note with me three lines of thought, one in each chapter, that Paul presents in this epistle about the 2nd coming of Christ.

1. First, Note the Preview of Christ's Coming.

In vs.7-10 Paul gives a preview of the Lord's coming. In it the apostle certainly establishes that the Lord will just as surely come the second time as He did the first. He will come literally and physically, but not in obscurity and humiliation as He did at His birth. Rather, He will come gloriously & majestically as the Great King. But the vital point to note in this preview of Christ's return that Paul gives is that he shows us that it will affect both the saved & the unsaved. The glorious event is shown here, as it is elsewhere, to be one single event impacting & affecting both His people and those who are not.

Note at the end of v.10 the words “*in that day.*” Only one day is in view in this passage with respect to this great event; a day in which saved and unsaved alike are going to be dealt with by the Lord. In other words, this passage offers no support for the theory that Christ's coming will be in two stages: first, at one point to “rapture” the saints; and then after a period of time, to deal with the unsaved in judgment. Such a view is very popular in various circles but this passage proves it to be invalid as does NT Scripture in general in dealing with this issue.

Note v.7 – this verse spells out most powerfully the glorious advent of Christ from heaven. Note the word “revealed” – in the original it reads “*at the revelation of the Lord Jesus...*” and signifies the fact of the public unveiling of Christ in His glory; and as v.8 shows, it will be “in flaming fire” to deal with the unsaved. Yet v.6 also shows so clearly that it will only be then that the Church will obtain her promised rest. The word *rest* signifies relaxation, loosing – and in this case the word is used of the Lord's people receiving rest from bands of affliction and persecution. Thus, it will be at Christ's public & visible revelation from heaven that the Church will be delivered from all of the persecution that their enemies have heaped on them.

Note in v.10 that when Christ comes He will “be glorified in His saints.” The grammatical structure of these words denotes instrumentality. Thus, when Christ comes He will be glorified by means of what he actually will then do for His people; namely, that He will glorify them, 1 Cor 15: 51-53 & 1 John 3: 2. The same idea is seen in the next clause “*to be admired in all them that believe.*” The word “admired” means *to be wondered at*. Moreover, He will be admired or wondered at because of what He will do for His people, the words “in all them that believe” having this same instrumental sense. At that day the Church will fully shine in all her glory; but the wonder, the admiration will be with respect to the Christ who by His redemptive work will have brought it all to pass. The Lamb will have all the glory because of what He has done in His people.

But as already noted, the 2nd advent will also affect the unsaved, vs. 8 & 9. These terms speak for themselves. They give a preview of the awful & catastrophic impact that Christ's coming will have “on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” These words are exceedingly clear – this preview of Christ's coming includes saved & unsaved alike. Both are in view; there is no division of time concerning the Lord's return with respect to its impact on saints & sinners.

2. Second, Note the Pointers to Christ's Coming.

We come here to ch 3. In vs.1 & 2 Paul spells out the situation that had developed in which there were those who were making the claim “that the day of Christ is at hand...” – meaning that He was just about to return. They claimed that they had a threefold basis for their teaching. Note first, they claimed that they had a Scriptural authority. Paul speaks of a “letter as from us.” The meaning is that they were taking Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians and were reading their own notions into it; making it say things it did not say. Then the Apostle also speaks of a “word” the reference being to the practice of taking Paul's teaching and expounding it. But what they were really doing was imposing their own ideas as if they were Paul's. We must always be on our guard against impositions placed on God's word, rather than expositions of it. Then, they also claimed that it was by “spirit” that they spoke – that is, some spiritual communication such as a vision or prophecy straight from heaven. As noted, the outcome was that many of the Lord's people were greatly disturbed by this issue as is always the case, thus Paul had to set before them a number of pointers to guide them in their thinking.

Those pointers are in v.3 – Paul by inspiration revealed that Christ's coming would be preceded by these two events: the development of the great apostasy and the emergence of the man of sin, and undoubtedly this teaching would have gone a long way to settle the minds of the people. The lesson to learn is that it is God's word that stabilises and strengthens the soul when the enemy comes to disturb the heart.

3. Finally, Note the Prescription for Christ's Coming.

See ch.3 – the prescription is threefold: *wait for Christ, vs.5; walk with Christ, vs.6-12; and witness for Christ, vs.13.*