

What's the Point....of 2 Thessalonians?

Mark Garner

The apostle Paul had been in Thessalonica for only a short time when he was driven out of town by religious authorities. Afterwards, he wrote a letter to the believers in Thessalonica, seeking to strengthen their understanding of a number of basic spiritual principles, including the idea that Jesus would someday return to bring us home. In this second epistle, he continues teaching them, and he also helps them see the implications of the message of Jesus and his future return.

Themes In 2 Thessalonians

Since his first epistle, Paul has heard of some misunderstandings that the Thessalonians have about the gospel, and has also learned that some of them are undergoing severe hardships. He will help them with both of these, and he also explains that being worthy of God's kingdom does not mean living up to human standards, rather it simply means to accept God's call to walk by faith in Jesus.

The Thessalonians were captivated by the thought that Jesus might actually return during their own lifetimes. Yet, as a result, they had been distracted and unsettled by misleading theories about his return. So the apostle wants to calm any feverish speculations, so that they can channel their time and effort into the more edifying things at the heart of the message of Jesus. We will need God's guidance and mercy every step. We are often faithless, yet the Lord is always faithful.

Overview Of 2 Thessalonians

Before going into his discussion of the topics that have confused the Thessalonians, Paul first gives thanks and praise for their perseverance in the midst of trouble, and takes time to comfort them in their sufferings (1:1-5). Then, the apostle reminds them of some basic truths about spiritual reality, in particular their eternal destiny, as well as the eternal fate of those who do not humbly seek God (1:6-12). He reminds them, and us, to appreciate the priceless value of our relationship with God.

About the second coming of Jesus, Paul urges them to keep calm and clear-minded about the topic (2:1-8). Even today it can be easy to be distracted by speculative theories about the second coming of Jesus and the "end times". Then too, it is misguided to try to identify "the man of lawlessness" with one human individual. If instead we learn to understand the pure message of Jesus, then it produces peace and contentment, instead of restlessness and discontent.

Paul next helps them to learn how to be strengthened by truth and grace (2:9-17). He cautions them not to fall into the "powerful delusions" that come from fleshly passions and desires, and instead to allow our Heavenly Father and his words give us the lasting hope and encouragement that God alone can give us. So he encourages us simply to continue in the greater truths of God, which transcend this world's circumstances and appearances.

He closes with a reminder that as we face this world's disappointments, worries, and confusion, we need one other's prayers and help, and most of all we all need God in our lives every moment (3:1-18). So Paul tells us not to be "busybodies" who cause controversies and divisions, and instead to see the positive things about one another, and to trust completely in God instead of in human strength, abilities, and plans. God is indeed faithful, and his compassion endures forever.

What's the Point....of 2 Thessalonians?

Caleb Dillinger

2 Thessalonians is a short 3 chapter letter from Paul to the Thessalonian church, focusing especially on the return of Christ and the temptations and hardships leading up to his return. It concludes with a plea for prayers and a warning/admonition against laziness. 2 Thessalonians is particularly ideal for Christians who want to hear from Paul in a short reading (compared to his lengthy Romans or 1 Corinthians) and wrestle with the world today and the long wait for Jesus to return.

The first chapter affirms the growing faith of the church and reflects positive boasting: not a boast in self, but in the faithfulness of others. Further, there is a love the church has for one another that leads to Paul giving thanks. It is not their great works or contributions or growth in numbers, but their faithfulness and love that leads to Paul's boasting in them. This is helpful for small churches not to feel bad about being small and unable to pay for big things, because that is not what God cares about, and it is helpful for big churches to remember their call is not to impress but to grow in faith and love.

The church, focusing on faith and love, will still face affliction and grief. Paul reminds the church that Jesus will return and take care of the wrongs, exacting justice and vengeance. It is not the Christian's job to do that; it is the job of Christ the judge. There is eternal punishment that the Lord will distribute. This is not mean to scare Christians into submission, but give hope that the wrongs done to believers will be addressed by God in the future. Ultimately, despite the hardship of the present times, the prayer of Paul is that the Lord Jesus might be glorified in the church, and that Christians live worthy of their calling.

The second chapter calls the church to stand firm in the midst of evil, particularly the man of lawlessness, a representative of Satan that deceives those who refuse the truth. Therefore, church, do not be deceived, but give thanks to God for the gospel and our sanctification.

The third chapter asks for prayers on behalf of Paul and Silas and Timothy. It additionally warns against idleness, pointing out that Paul and his companions were not idle working with the church, and the church should not put up with busybodies now. He exhorts people to work quietly and earn their living, not growing weary of doing good.

It is easy to grow weary in this life. The point of reading 2 Thessalonians is that the church does not grow weary, but does good, and remains faithful and loving even in hard times.