

*“Gospelizing” the Faithfulness of Christ
Among the Gentiles:
A Study of the Letters to the Galatians and Thessalonians
Diocese of West Texas
Spring & Fall 2010*

Study and Reflection Session 12:
2 Thessalonians 1:1-3:18
Standing Firm and Holding Fast the Traditions

As we noted in the Introduction, this study of 2 Thessalonians addresses the entire letter in one session. For this reason, there is no word-for-word translation of the entire letter, but rather some considerations of interesting subjects that are raised in the letter. Please use your own Bible for reviewing the text of the letter.

Summary Comments on 2 Thessalonians

Chapter 1. In the opening of the letter, Paul praises the Thessalonians and thanks them for their faithfulness and love (1:3-5), in spite of suffering the afflictions of “those who do not know God and obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (1:8). Paul prays for them, especially that they may continue to be worthy of God’s call (1:11).

Chapter 2. The second chapter of the letter takes up the subject of the *parousia* of Christ, a word that means “appearance” or “presence” of Christ. It comes to be almost a technical term for Christian expectation. The later term “the second coming” is not quite accurate to the very early Christian understanding of the *parousia*.

- Here, the author tells of signs of the *parousia*, and things that must happen before it occurs: the rebellion that must come first, and the exposure of the “lawless one.” These subjects are not raised in the letters that are generally agreed to be authored by Paul himself.
- Paul’s principal exhortation to the Thessalonians is that they “stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter” (2:15).

Chapter 3. This chapter again brings up the subject of the tension between the faithful, and evil people who are not of “the faith” (3:2).

- But perhaps the most dangerous threat to the faithfulness of the community comes from those believers “who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us” (3:6).
- Paul encourages the community to imitate his ways with them, working to support himself, so that he would not be a burden to them (3:7-12). In parallel fashion, he tells them *not* to associate with those who do not follow the patterns of Paul’s life (3:14).
- 3:13 has been used through the ages to encourage Christians: “Do not grow weary in doing what is right.”
- The letter closes with a strong assertion that it is indeed a letter of Paul (perhaps a suspiciously strong assertion?) (3:17).

Questions for Reflection

1. 2 Thessalonians calls us to examine, in our own context, where the greatest threats to our faithfulness come from. Are we deluded into “believing what is false and taking pleasure in injustice” (3:11-12)? Or are we perhaps lured into a lazy attitude toward our faith by people in our own Christian community? What measure of commitment to

holiness, justice, and love of neighbor does Christ require of us? In our study of 1 Thessalonians, we spoke of *growth* in holiness. What might be your next step in growth toward holiness and away from the world's delusions?

2. Whom do you know, who might need to hear a word of encouragement from you, in order not to "grow weary in doing what is right"?
3. The author of this letter exhorts the Thessalonians, in a very hard time, to "stand firm and hold fast to the traditions." This is a common exhortation for communities that are undergoing persecution. Do you think this teaching is valid equally for communities that are not undergoing persecution? What, in your opinion, is most important to stand firm about? What traditions are most essential to your understanding of Christian faith and faithfulness? From whom did you receive these traditions? Have you ever experienced a time when you felt that Christ was calling you to let go of something you had been standing firm about? How did you recognize Christ's correction of you?
4. Think back over this whole study of Galatians, and 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Was there a moment in your study when you had some new insight into your Christian practice? What do you most want to remember from this study? Is there a verse that you want to memorize?

*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself
and God our Father,
who loved us and, through grace,
gave us eternal comfort and good hope,*

*comfort your hearts and strengthen them
in every good work and word.
(2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)*