

Route 66

2 Thessalonians: Settle Down

Part 53 – March 6, 2011



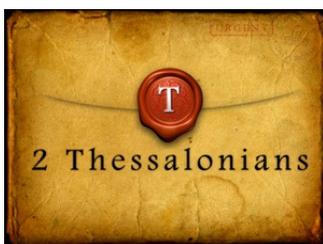
Paul had a tendency for getting run out of town. When he was run out of Philippi, he spent only three weeks in Thessalonica before fleeing the mob. He went to Berea [buh-REE-uh], was promptly forced out, and headed south to Athens. Timothy went back to check on the Thessalonians while Paul, of his own will, went to Corinth.



You may recall the Corinthian marketplace, where Paul most likely set up his tent making shop. Timothy returned here, with a positive report, and Paul wrote his first letter. A few months later however, news comes that the Thessalonians are buying into a rather bizarre deception.



We discussed the Thessalonian marketplace that was discovered in 1962. Someone came to this ancient city (with a letter in Paul's name), and convinced them that the reason they were suffering persecution was because Jesus had come back, and "the train had left the station without them" so to speak.



So, Paul fires off a second letter to these young and vulnerable believers after only about six months since his first.

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. – 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 NIV



And, to help them spot a future forgery, Paul draws attention to his signature at the end of this brief, three-chapter letter.

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write. – 2 Thessalonians 3:17 NIV

But, why would someone do this to the Thessalonians?!

I'm guessing that whoever did this was hawking overpriced tickets to an End-Times seminar, being held in the Mediterranean Room at the Thessalonian equivalent of a Holiday Inn! I'm also guessing this scam wasn't limited to Thessalonica.



I'm *even* guessing it was a *trio* of conmen named, Hymenaeus [HIGH-meh-NEE-uhs], Alexander, and Philetus [fih-LEE-tuhs]. In First Timothy (1:19), Paul warns of certain men who've rejected not only their faith, but their own conscience as well.

Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme. - 1 Timothy 1:20 NIV

And later (in chapter six), when he's talking about unnamed teachers of false doctrine who have corrupt minds, he says ...

... [they] think that godliness is a means to financial gain. - 1 Timothy 6:5b NIV

And then, in Second Timothy (2:16-17), Paul talks about ungodly teachers, whose godless chatter will spread like gangrene.

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus ... They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. - 2 Timothy 2:17-18 NIV

Hmm ... the more things change, the more they stay the same! Like in his first letter, Paul praises their perseverance under persecution (1:4); but now he uses the subject to reassure them, that even those who don't know Jesus will notice His return.



God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. - 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 NIV

Thanks to the deception in Thessalonica, Paul's second letter is a treasure trove of reassuring passages concerning the end times.

I don't want to trace out the various Christian theories on the End Times. But, I do want to look at *three* end Time Urges Paul warns the Thessalonians and, by extension, us to avoid:

1. The first urge to purge is this: Don't be deceived

[Jesus said] ... if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or, "There he is!" do not believe it. ... For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. - Matthew 24:23b,27 NIV



And just as Jesus' coming will be globally unmistakable, Paul says there will likewise be obvious signs of its approaching.

Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. - 2 Thessalonians 2:3 NIV

The "man of lawlessness" is often referred to as the antichrist. He'll lead a "rebellion" against God; and by so doing, will be "revealed", to the faithful, for what he is: a great big phony!

He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. - 2 Thessalonians 2:4 NIV

Shouldn't be too difficult to discern; yet, many *will be* deceived. Jesus said: "even the elect – if that were possible". (Mat 24:24)

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil **that deceives those who are perishing**. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. - 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 NIV

Paul explains how and why they are deceived: "they refused to love the truth" and (because of that), they refused to "be saved". The deception comes through temptation, not trickery.

So then, brothers, **stand firm** and **hold to the teachings** we passed on to you ... - 2 Thessalonians 2:15a NIV

Those who love truth, and embrace salvation through faith in Christ, have every reason to be confident and composed rather than "unsettled" or "alarmed" as Paul warned against (in 2:2).

2. The second urge to discourage is: **Don't be disturbed**

As a Pentecostal teenager, I was *very* disturbed by speculations that have since come and gone. I spent more time contemplating the coming of the antichrist than the coming of *Jesus* Christ! I was overly focused on the plan and the power of the *enemy*. The most reassuring part of that passage about the "man of lawlessness" is Paul's reminder the he is "doomed to destruction".



There's a popular misconception in our culture, that God and Satan are fairly equal opponents. That good and evil have been battling it out since time began; and *hopefully*, in the end, if *everything* goes as God has planned, He'll outwit, outplay, and outlast the devil. Not surprisingly, Paul has a slightly different take on it.

For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. - 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 NIV

This is it: the big end times' crescendo and climax of evil! The culmination of every last ounce of wickedness that the enemy has been conniving since he rebelled against God is turned loose! And Jesus "overthrows" it with: "the breath of his mouth"; and utterly "destroys" it by: "the splendor of his coming".



It's nothing at *all* like a match between *fairly equal* opponents. It's more like, "In the right corner, weighing 3 milligrams, a really small ant; and in the left corner, weighing too much for the scale, a really big bulldozer!"



Hmm ... can't really see that ant anymore. And *that's* not even the bulldozer ... it's the one *behind* it ... see the blade there? There's only one problem with this analogy: I'm *underselling* it.

The man of lawlessness and those tempted by lawlessness are allowed to oppose God, so evil can be fully revealed in Heaven and on earth for what it is, and God's unmatched glory for what *it* is!

There *is* an ultimate evil and an Ultimate Good. And in God's timing and for His purpose, the Ultimate Good will ultimately destroy the ultimate evil, simply by breathing and being! And it'll have a universe shattering impact on the ant; but on the bulldozer, not so much.

3. The final urge to submerge: **Don't be distracted**

Our Membership Manual says (in part): "We discourage an excessive preoccupation with end times speculations. It usually distracts the believer, and detracts from the Gospel." Don't get me wrong; I *enjoy* speculating about Jesus' return! And we shouldn't bury our heads in the sand. We just can't let it distract us from the *reason* He's waiting.

Some Thessalonians used the hubbub as a distraction from work; and may have considered themselves spiritually superior *to* (and mooched off *of*) those who carried on with life as usual.

We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. - 2 Thessalonians 3:11-13 NIV

I can have an intricately woven eschatological hypothesis, and still be an unloving husband, insensitive father, and a tactless, inconsiderate witness; because that isn't what changes a heart.



There'll always be someone ready to distract us from our mission with the latest "fulfilled prophecy" or headline-based theory. Just look at what's going on in the Middle East! The media seems to have it narrowed down to two possible outcomes: a positive democratic turn or the end of civilization as we know it. And it very well could be signaling the beginning of the end.

But then, so was the Y2K bug, the European Union, the United Nations, barcodes, Communism, and President Ronald Wilson Reagan (six letters in his first, middle, and last name: that's 666!). There's only one way to know for sure: hindsight.

In the meanwhile, I'll keep my focus on the here and now instead of the there and then. When Paul closed this letter, he said ...

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. - 2 Thessalonians 3:16a NIV