

20th April 2017

Introduction

Overview of 2 Thessalonians

Dear Brethren and Sisters of the Lord Jesus.

Thessalonica, known as Salonika today was in Paul's day, the capital of Macedonia, enjoyed political autonomy. As a military and commercial centre, it had become well known for its wealth, as well as its vice, attracting a real mixture of Roman high society and pagan sensuality, as we read in the first epistle, of these Gentiles allowing their bodies to be controlled by the lust of concupiscence (sexual passion). The city also attracted merchants from other parts of the empire including many Jews. The nucleus of the ecclesia included some of these where Paul won his first converts when he went to the synagogue in the city when he first arrived. But also it was through the Jews that he received the most disruption. His ministry in the city lasted less than a month, as these Jews brought him before the politarchs of the city, politarchs, that is the title Luke uses in Acts 17: 6, 8 which as archaeology has proven is the correct term for the Hellenistic and Roman-era Macedonian title for an elected governor (archon) of a city (polis). By these, Paul was expelled from the city. He went onto Berea, where he met great initial success, but the Jews from Thessalonica followed him, and continued to cause havoc. Paul further travelled to Athens, barely escaping with his life. From here, Paul sent his travelling companion Timothy to check up on the spiritual health and the situation with the new ecclesia in Thessalonica.

The Acts of the Apostle further explains how Paul went to Corinth and remained there a long while, receiving back Timothy and Silas, who reported encouraging news on the Macedonian ecclesia. It can

be reasonably concluded that Paul wrote the first epistle while at Corinth, and it seems very likely that the second one which we are looking at this evening, was also penned, there, as he addresses them in a similar fashion, as the first, courteously referring to his two co travellers, and who had reported back to him on the ecclesia development. Additionally the subject matter of the second letter is a continuation of an issue which Paul addressed in the first letter, so it seems this second letter quickly followed that of the first. It seems that there is some probability, that the Epistle was written before the troubles came upon Paul at Corinth under the administration of Gallio Acts 18:12-16, And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat ... and yet that he saw that the storm was approaching, and quite possibly hints at it in 2 Thessalonians 3:2, "And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men."

Further this second letter appears to be a result of further reports that had been brought back Paul's companions. Not all the news was encouraging. 3:11.... *For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.* Despite Paul being in Corinth, carrying out important ministerial work there, nevertheless, he showed a deep and abiding connection with the ecclesia in Thessalonica, as indeed he did with all the ecclesias 2 Corinthians 11:27-29. *In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?* In this letter to the Thessalonians we see proof of this care. His keenness and close connection, his evident and abounding happiness in the good news he was told about their development is obvious: 3-4 . *We are bound*

to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;. This really is a worthy accolade. We note how Paul admired the way: everyone one of you all toward each other – the comprehensive cross working of agape between all members of the ecclesia. It is not a characteristic that is praised in any other ecclesia, but in Thessalonica, here Paul is actually repeating something he has already observed 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10
But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;

Even with this new ecclesia there was room for improvement. - How much more in well-established ecclesias where the initial ardour and enthusiasm can wane, and other distractions creep in. Verse 4 *So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:* Not in the sense that it made Paul look good, that is not what he meant, but that there disposition was such that they used the example of the Thessalonians to other ecclesias, to demonstrate thriving under difficult circumstances and how they did it. It is similar to what he said in his first letter 1 Thessalonians 2:19 *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?* The Apostle James offered the same message, the consistent apostolic exhortation James 1:3-4: *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing,* the supreme example of Jesus setting the way, thus *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,*

despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. This Paul said was what the Thessalonians were doing, and it was useful evidence to other ecclesias of faith in action: 5. *Which is a manifest token or evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:* But more than this. 6. *Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;*

Note the colon at the end of verse 5, there are two sides of God's judgement. First when we receive tribulations in the ecclesia it is a sign that somewhere along the line sin is being fought against, to create that friction. It is then no reason to be downcast, but to be cheerful in that it is evidence that good work is being done, in us, and in one another. God sees within the heart and that is all that matters, but also he sees the cause of persecution, tribulation, the unsavoury aspects, and that he will also judge. Then the Apostle introduces the subject that seems to be the cause of some contention. While we are on the subject of judgement, he seems to say, and to you who are troubled (v7) rest with us, Diaglott adds the word together, rest together with us, rest : Gr *anesis*, relax, be released, do not worry, be composed, rest with us, us, that is Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, who were also suffering for the truths sake. Enduring all manner of affliction and persecution, contentions, within and without, all sorts of difficulties, it was nothing less than what followers in Christ should expect, take up your cross and follow me, we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. Paul in just a couple of words, draws alongside, shows he is in the same boat.. and sharing difficulties identifying with one another instead of being standoffish and aloof, is as Paul demonstrates the way to be, for we are all the same.

These words of Paul are very reminiscent of Psalm 37. And Paul explains that there is no need to be overly concerned, look at the bigger picture – 8 – 10 *when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.* He now expands upon his reference to judgement and the Kingdom of God earlier in the letter.

Being more specific, he expounds the nature of Christ's return, and the judgement prior to the establishment of the Kingdom of God, from heaven, not to heaven we note, but clearly on earth, with the angels, of his power as Diaglott puts it. Jesus as other passages explain will appear to the world with angels of his power, that is his messengers, and who these are, Paul shows that is the saints, those separated and sanctified by the gospel. Coming in fire, not literally, but in judgement on those who believe not, who have effectively caused so much anxiety, anguish and friction with those who do believe. They will have time no longer, punished with everlasting destruction, that is aeonian destruction for the hidden period, that is until the end of the millennium, and the Revelation of Jesus Christ explains. But we note the little words in brackets in verse 10. - *because our testimony among you was believed*, he is connecting the labour, the faithful endurance of the Thessalonians directly with future believers, and here we are 2000 years later reading the same words, identifying with the Thessalonians, and being helped but Pauls testimony and advice to them, because it is appropriate and relevant to us the Dartford ecclesia just as much. What a lovely way

to cheer up the Thessalonians. We must tell them that when we meet them in the Kingdom. The latter two verses of this first chapter being equally relevant that we are worthy of such a calling, and that the purpose of the election is not that we have an easy and comfortable life and all just get along with other just fine, having no difficulties or problems, for without any of that how would tribulations make an impact, how would we learn endurance, but instead the purpose is that the name of Jesus Christ be glorified. Again we suggest, that in reminding the Thessalonians of the justice of God, and that vengeance belongs to him, when and where he decides, it really is a similar approach to how such a subject is dealt with in Psalm 37.

In chapter 2 It seems that some had gained the misapprehension that Jesus was just about to appear, that the end of the current cosmos was about to end. This evidence can be seen in 1-3 . *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means:....* The translators have not been particularly helpful, we beseech you by the coming of the Lord, they have made it as if Paul is making an oath, or using emphatic language for effect, Instead it should read, we entreat you brethren concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus and our assembling to him.... Straight away we can see the tone changes, and it is a tone of disquiet and unease. It is apparent to Paul, that some within the ecclesia, they had got hold of a wrong idea about the second coming of Christ, and that it was causing a bit of a stir. It seems that some were believing that Jesus Christ was about to appear at any moment. Paul seems to acknowledge, that he had heard that some were claiming they had

got this idea from a letter he Paul had sent, note the words *nor by letter as from us...* True Paul could be referring to someone sending forged letters in his name, but we also note the words Paul says we entreat you brethren concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus and our assembling to him, this appears very much to be an allusion to 1 Thessalonians 4 where Paul was describing how all the saints will be gathered together at the Lord's return. So Paul is admitting the fact that some may have misunderstood what he was saying, and now he sets about correcting this misunderstanding. He was not suggesting that Jesus Christ was about to return right away and establish the Kingdom, not at all, The day of Christ is not at hand he says, *Let no man deceive you for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;. Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.* Let no man deceive you. This strongly implies that there was a subversive element in the ecclesia, that not only misunderstood the nature of Christ return and events leading up to it, but were teaching the same also, trying to manipulate the ecclesia into their way of thinking. So much so that as we will see from the third chapter, people were actually making bad decisions on this false information, and behaving in irrational ways. Paul needed to set the record straight. Let no man delude you by any means, because the falling away, (greek apostacy) must come first, and there must be revealed that man of sin, that son of destruction, who lifts himself above everything called Divinity or Majesty, quoting Diaglott again.

Many have claimed Paul was speaking of this and that and all sorts of weird and wonderful suggestions, such as the prophet Mohammed as being the man of sin, and so on. But Paul explains that the

mystery of iniquity was already working verse 7, so it was an influence already in existence, and speaks of this influence growing greater and greater, in verse 9 as an adversary, against the truth, with all power, and signs and wonders of falsehood, and verse 10 with unrighteous deception, and added to this powerful force, God would send them the energy of delusion, that they would continue in their lie, to separate the righteous from the unrighteous, ready for God's judgement. In this we see from the chapter, from Paul's comments that he is not just speaking of just one man in history, as some claim, such as Caligula, but it is a system, which has all power, that is a universal system, an universal apostasy, headed by a singular representative who is worshipped as God. It is worth noting the way Paul in verse 4 seems to be echoing the sentiment of the prophet Daniel 11: 36 *And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done.. Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all.*

We have the advantage of nearly 2000 years of history to identify this son of perdition, or destruction as it means, this apostasy. And the day of the Lord still has not come. We note how Daniel in referring to the king was actually referring to a succession of kings. Also we can see the Apostle also was referring to a succession of the title man of sin, for he refers to the man of sin being in the Thessalonians not too distant future yet says that the man of signs lying wonders would persist until the coming of the Saviour. History reveals the great false religious system which is universal, which claims to be the Kingdom of God, which is headed by one who claims

to be the vicar of Christ, antichrist, places himself higher than God, or at least as God, with the doctrine of infallibility, and thus above the law, that Wicked or lawless one. The point being, that as Paul said verse 5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? The beginnings of this apostasy or falling away were already underway. False Christendom was already in its infancy verse 7 *For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.* A difficult verse perhaps to follow: Perhaps the Diaglott is more helpful: for the secret of lawlessness is already working till only the one restraining for the present shall be out of the way. What power was it in those early days that was withholding, or holding back the expansion of the apostasy? There can be at least two suggestions. The first is Jesus Christ himself. We recall from our Revelation classes, that it was he who was given the scroll to unseal, and that the power of the nations was given into his hand. But if Paul was referring to him, in what way was he taken out of the way. Jesus is still on the right hand of power. Another suggestion is the administration of the secular empire of Rome. There were early corruptions in the church at Rome, as there were elsewhere, but peculiarly there, as Rome was the seat of philosophy and of power, and there were great efforts made by the bishop of Rome to increase his authority, and there was a steady approximation to what he subsequently claimed - that of being Universal Bishop. This all being in the relative near future of the Thessalonians. They would have recognised the beginnings of this kind of politics.

But this restraining power over designs of the Bishop of Rome was taken out of the way when the seat of empire was removed to Constantinople, and Catholicism as such became the religion of the empire. Paul in not so many words of course was inferring, and

describing future events in this second chapter to illustrate that a lot had to happen before Jesus Christ could return to the earth to bring about the judgement and retribution the righteous wait so patiently for. In the face of all this bad news, and evidence of the necessity of the apostasy, there must needs be offences, Paul raises a warning in this letter verse 15: *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.* The Apostle under inspiration we must not forget, is thus informing his readers, the Thessalonians [and Dartfordians as well], that his word, his letter, their traditions, the traditions of the Apostles are equivalent to the commands of Christ, being that he is under Divine Inspiration as he penned this letter. Thus we so named as the Apostolic Ecclesia declare our firm conviction that this is so, that Paul's advice, commands for the post Jewish world, a new cosmos, the times of the Gentiles in which we live, under siege from the apostasy, and idolatry and the filthy communication of the wicked we do well to maintain the same traditions, Greek paradosis, transmission, that is ordinances, by extension commands, which hold the same weight as the words of Christ Jesus. We know all this of course. But some who claim to have the truth we know such as the Christadelphians seem to have abandoned many traditions of the Apostle to fit in with modern society, an issue the Thessalonians themselves were facing as Paul in the third chapter acknowledges 11. *For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.*

The Apostle makes several strong points in this last chapter, a couple of which we would introduce. The first is the effects of the wrong understand of when Christ would return. Many were thinking that Christ would immediately appear, or were about to. Either because of misunderstanding Paul's first letter, or because of letters forged

and purportedly in his name, mixed with dodgy ideas from the Jews who thought now was the time, some it appears were so convinced of the imminent return of Christ that they had in preparation of that event packed up their jobs, and were not working at all, and generally making a bit of a nuisance of themselves. Because they presumably thought that their trades, or contracts were no longer necessary, it was not their role to support themselves, but now it was their role to spread the news that Jesus was just around the corner. Problem was he wasn't. Instead their lack was having to be made up by others. Because they had spare time on their hands they were going from house to house, , working not at all, but Greek *perigadzome*, working all around, busybodies getting involved in everything, in short walking disorderly. *Atakteo* irregular. All of this irregular behaviour, out of kilter with the ecclesia, and not following the apostolic tradition, had actually spawned from a misunderstanding. But Paul sets out the case. When he came to visit them, he said he showed the example, he did not behave irregularly, disorderly, and become beholden to the generosity of others, but ensured he was chargeable to no one, verse 8, both he and his fellow travellers, working as they preached, night and day we read, to make sure that they did not place a burden on anyone else. And why did they do this, when they were perfectly entitled to benefit seeing as they were doing Christ's work, the reason, so that they could set an example to others without being told well you don't do it.. verse 9. If Paul thought it unnecessary to work, because preaching or other aspects were priority, why did he do the opposite.

So in action he countered the disorderly conduct, and in word. Thus verse 12, *Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.* In quietness not

irregularly, but regularly, not being busybodies working all round, but focussing on their own responsibilities, and priorities, not misconceptions, and self-appointed traditions. To patiently wait for Christ, verse 5, and not try to force the agenda. The second point Paul makes is what to do with these people 14. *And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

Everyone has an aberration from time to time. If Paul thought that such incidents were beyond help or reconciliation he would not have written in the way he did. He speaks of withdrawing. The Apostle speaks of avoiding, turning away, putting away, in various terms of increasing emphasis in degrees of separation. However in this case Paul instructs have no company that he be not ashamed, that is there is evident reason that a reconciliation is not just possible but probable, as the root cause of the issue is a misunderstanding, and wrong behaviour. This gives the opportunity to the disorderly to see the irregular pattern of their conduct, and how by not following the traditions as outlined by the apostle, they are in sin. The opportunity for repentance, for guidance, for reformation must be always patiently pursued. Verse 15: 15. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. Why did the Apostle feel it necessary to say this? Because in the overriding atmosphere which exists which the Apostle acknowledges of the apostasy on every hand, of great care being exercised both within and without to maintain the high standards, when there is disorderly behaviour and breaking from the traditions, the brother or sister concerned can become perceived as the enemy too easily. But as we know from other passages the teaching of Christ and the Apostles a vital and important process must always be adhered to with the overarching aim of gaining that

brother. It was Paul's aim of course to gain his brethren and sisters in Thessalonica and to fortify them against false teachings, and to exhort and comfort them to help them be alert in the face of ever present danger, and for that we are grateful and the message of the Apostle is just as powerful today.