

A
SHORT SUMMARY
OF THE
EPISTLES TO THE
THESSALONIANS.

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A SHORT SUMMARY

OF

1 THESSALONIANS.



THE Epistles to the Thessalonians were the earliest written of any of Paul's writings. They appear to have been written from Corinth after Timothy's return from Macedonia. Compare 1 Thess. iii. 6, and Acts xviii. 5. In Acts xvii. we have the short account given to us of Paul's visit to Thessalonica. He appears to have preached for three Sabbath days in the synagogue of the Jews there, reasoning out of the scriptures, proving from them that Messiah must needs have suffered and risen from the dead before setting up His kingdom, and that the Jesus whom Paul preached to them was the Messiah. The consequence was, that some believed the testimony and consorted with Paul and Silas ; and of the devout Greeks, a great multitude, and of the chief women, not a few. This stirred up the envy of the Jews that believed not, and they took certain lawless men of the city, and made an uproar ; assaulted the house of Jason who had received the brethren, and sought to draw the apostles out to the people. When they could not find them, they drew Jason and certain brethren to the rulers of the city crying, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also ; whom Jason hath received, and these do all

contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, there is another king, even Jesus." And they troubled the rulers of the city, when they had heard these things; and when they had taken security of Jason and the other, they let them go. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas unto Berea.

This is the account we have in the Acts of the sojourn of Paul and Silas at Thessalonica. The subject preached seems to have been the Messiah* of the Prophets, as dead, risen, and the coming king, that He must needs have suffered before coming to reign; and then the Messiah of the prophets was identified with Jesus of Nazareth. Thus the young converts were just barely converted and instructed in the elements of christian truth when their fathers in Christ had to leave. After Paul had been sent on to Athens from Berea, Timothy appears after having stayed at the latter place for a while, to have come on to him, and then to have been sent back from Athens to Thessalonica to help on the young converts. He afterward rejoined the Apostle with Silas at Corinth. (See 1. Thess. iii. 1-2. Acts xviii 5.)

We have a further truth brought out in the first chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians, besides that which Paul preached in the synagogue of Thessalonica. There, as we have seen, he identified the Messiah of the prophets with Jesus the Anointed of Nazareth. He was the Christ. He must needs have suffered, for the nation was sinful, and have been raised from the dead, and was coming back to reign. Those who repented and believed were baptized and got introduced into the kingdom. They took distinct new ground, by His death and

NOTE.—Messiah is the Hebrew word answering to the Greek word, Christ, *i.e.*, Anointed. It is the official title of the Lord; the Anointed Prophet, Priest, King. Jesus is his personal name. "Son of God" revealing the Father, is the name of relationship.

resurrection, confessing the King that had been rejected and waiting for his return to reign. But here there is added truth which is properly Christian truth. Here we have the revelation of the Father and the Son. The assembly is addressed as being in God the *Father*, and in the Lord Jesus Christ. They had turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His *Son*, from heaven, to take them into His *Father's* house, before the Messiah came to reign. The truth was the Anointed had been rejected by the Jewish nation and the world; that relationship, therefore, as a public known thing in the world, was put off. He had taken a new position, in the heavenly glory as the Son of God, and the Father was now calling out a heavenly family in connection with His Son, who had breathed into them His own Life of resurrection. (John xx. 22.) This change was indicated in His words to Mary Magdalene after He rose from the dead, "Touch me not for I am not yet ascended to my Father." The Jewish relationship was put off till after His ascension and return. He was about to ascend to His Father, and she was to carry the message to those whom He now owned as His brethren, saying, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." Thus, though these Christians had been brought to the confession of Jesus being the Anointed, and had been baptized into His name, yet that was not the height of their Christian place. Redemption had taken them out of their Adam condition, and had put them into the new place the Son of God had taken: His life, communicated to them, had given them the position of sons before the Father. God was no longer hidden behind a veil, but fully revealed in Christ as being for them.

My reader, Do you know the Son of God? Many

make no difference between His name of Jesus, *i.e.*, Saviour; the Christ, or the Anointed; and the Son of God; but there is all the difference possible, though all belonging to the same Person, and Himself the object of faith and knowledge under different names.

We get, in the 1st Epistle, a beautiful exhibition of the freshness of life exhibited in a young Assembly just planted, as well as the exhibition of the power of that ministry that had planted it. We see also the intensity of affection that existed mutually between the fathers in the faith and the young converts. The first chapter is filled with a song of praise by the Apostle as he remembered the fruits manifested by the Thessalonians of their election of God: the power with which the gospel had come unto them, which they had received with much assurance and joy. These fruits were manifested in the word of God having sounded out from them, so that their faith God-ward was spread abroad around. This commended the ministry of the Apostles, the fruit of which ministry was thus manifested in their turning away from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His returning Son from heaven. Thus they had become followers of the Apostle who, in chap. ii., reminds them of His walk amongst them, and shows them how tenderly he had treated them as a nurse, and exhorted them faithfully as a father, to walk worthy of God who had called them to His kingdom and glory. They had, by receiving the Word, not only followed Paul and those with him, but had become followers of the Assemblies of God in Judea, and had then been persecuted in consequence. He then, verse 17, shows the earnest desire he had of seeing them, having made one or two attempts, but Satan had hindered him, and at last, chapter iii, when he could no longer forbear, he had sent Timothy to establish them and comfort them in the faith,

He then desires them to abound in love one toward another, to the end their hearts might be established unblameable in holiness in the day of the Lord Jesus, exhorting them, chapter iv., to beware of fornication, to follow after holiness, and to love one another, working with their own hands, thus walking honestly before all. From verse 13 onwards, he comforts them in regard to their departed brethren, putting before them in a true light the coming of the Lord Jesus, as the day when they should rejoin all their departed brethren by being caught up to meet the Lord in the air; and then chapter v. shows how, in this way, they would be entirely delivered from Christ's judgment of the ungodly world, whilst He would come for salvation for them. Thus they were to comfort and build up one another. Also to remember those that laboured in the Lord amongst them, and to esteem them very highly for their works sake. Exhortations follow with a short commendation, which ends the Epistle. In the 1st chapter we have the birth of the young believers mentioned; in the 2nd chapter their nursing and care; in the 3rd their standing; in the 4th their walking, and in the 5th their watching.

The second coming of the Lord has a special place in both Epistles, and is mentioned in every chapter. In the first chapter it is put chiefly in connection with the Person coming to deliver the Thessalonians; He was the one they were to wait for. In the second chapter it is put in connection with the labourer's reward. In the third chapter it is looked at in connection with the daily walk of the believers. In chapter iv. as the place where the saints would rejoin their departed brethren, in chapter v. as the day of judgment for the ungodly world, from which the saints would be delivered by being caught up first to meet the Lord in the air, and

so it was a day of salvation to them. Finally, he prays that their whole spirit, soul, and body, might be preserved blameless till the coming of the Lord, Jesus Christ. All this shows what a place the Lord's coming had in the teaching of the Apostles, how it was connected with the believers' hope and expectation, the labourer's crown of reward, the motive for the believer's walk, the comfort of the sorrowing, and the building them up and their establishment in the knowledge of full deliverance from judgment. Is not the general low state of believers attributable to the fact that this great truth is so much kept in the back ground, and that believers consequently are trembling at the thought of a general judgment, when their cases would be settled as well as those of the ungodly at the same tribunal? This would never be; if the true doctrine of the coming of the Lord was seen. In the first Epistle the doctrine is chiefly pressed in regard to the complete salvation of true believers in Christ, before the day of judgment. In the second Epistle it is seen chiefly in reference to the ungodly and the apostacy of Christendom. Consequently, there it is judgment.

But now let us return and look more leisurely through our Epistle. Paul, Silas, and Timothy address the Assembly. The Assembly is looked at in a different way to that of other Epistles. It is addressed in its relationship to the Father, rather than in connection with Christ the Head of His body.* It is the Assembly of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the thought of God's family that is here; delightfully suitable to young Christians, babes in Christ. who

NOTE.—We find generally in the Epistles of Paul the title "the Christ" put in connection with His position in His glory, and with the body, the church. It is the Anointed, rejected of the Jews, taking a new place in heaven, and getting for Himself a body, a bride, during the time of His rejection Christ without the article is generally a proper name.

would be rejoicing in their first knowledge of the Father (see 1 John ii., 13.) The Son of God, in His place down here on the earth, said to Philip, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me." And then having taken His place at the right hand of God, after having accomplished redemption, He says in reference to the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came down, "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." (John xiv. 10, 20.) It was not till after the Cross that the disciples got their full place as sons, or their full knowledge of that place. Up to Christ the Gentiles were entirely outside; the Jewish nation in the place of privilege, in the place of servant of Jehovah. The believers amongst them were heirs, but in the position of servants. (See Ephes. ii. 11-12; Isaiah xli. 8; Gal. iv. 1-3). In the fulness of time Christ came, made of a woman, made under the law, and by redemption took the Jewish heirs out of the place of servants and put them in the place of sons. He was the Son of God, declared to be so by the resurrection from the dead, risen out from under the whole power of the enemy and the world, to give every believer the place of sons before the Father. Go, tell my brethren, He said, after His resurrection, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." Forty days after, the Lord ascended to heaven, and the Holy Ghost, having come down from heaven, gave them the knowledge of their place according to the Word; "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." (John xiv. 20.) Blessed place! My reader, do you know it? The Gentile believer, also got the same place through the preaching of Peter to Cornelius; and by Paul afterwards.

Having addressed the Assembly then in their place as connected with God the Father, the Apostle lets

out his heart in thankfulness to God, as he remembered their work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God the Father, knowing thus their election of God. The work of faith was manifest, for they were standing fast in their place as saved ones in separation from the heathen and Jews around them, and as an Assembly in conscious relationship with the Father. Whilst the heathen around were going on serving idols and the Jews were formally serving God under the covenant title of Jehovah, here was an Assembly called out from both, confessing together God as their Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, as their Saviour, and knowing their place as children. Surely this was the work of faith of itself. But then faith is not merely a cold objective thing when real; it works by love. Spiritual life is communicated where faith is real in the Son, and this life is a life of love, which manifests itself all around by good works. The believer shows his love by labouring in Christ's cause, and manifests His life here below. These Thessalonians too had been taught that that Jesus in whom they believed, was coming again to receive them to himself, to give them a bright home in His Father's house. They had turned to God to wait for God's Son from heaven, and in the mean time, whilst the delay took place, were patiently waiting for the time, enduring the persecution of their enemies without murmur. Thus faith, hope, and love were in full exercise, showing their reality in their fruits. How could the Apostle doubt their election of God?

Verse 5. It was a cause of thankfulness then, as shown by its lasting fruits, how the Gospel had not come to them in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, as they knew what manner of men these servants had been amongst them for their sakes, They had become followers of the

Apostles and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost; so that they were ensamples to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia; for from them had sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place their faith Godward was spread abroad, so that the Apostles needed not to speak anything; these Christians themselves showing of the Apostles what manner of entering in they had unto the Thessalonians, and how they had turned to God from idols to serve the living and the true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivered them from the wrath to come.

My reader, what blessed proofs we have here of the power of the ministry of the Apostles, and its real effects on men and women who were before, many of them, but ignorant heathen. It came to them in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. It was received in much affliction, but with joy of the Holy Ghost. It sounded forth to others, as proving its reality. Thus here we have a picture of a people just converted from heathenism, fully assured of their salvation and relationship; knowing the Father and the Son, with whom they were connected; much persecuted, but full of joy, serving the living and true God, and waiting for His Son from heaven to come back again to take them to glory. Happy people! And what could produce this but the power of the Holy Ghost, which dwelt in them? They turned to God with a double object, to serve the *living* and *true* God, no doubt in contrast to idols, and to wait for His Son from heaven, Jesus, which had delivered them from the wrath to come.

And now, my readers, permit me to ask you whether this last verse is a picture to you of your

own conversion. You will tell me, "Well, I am not a heathen." True! But still there must be a turning to God in your case. Even a strict religionist like Nicodemus, had to be born again. The disciples themselves were told, "Except ye be converted and become as little children ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." Paul says of every man universally, "There is none righteous, no, not one." Every man, Jew, Gentile, or Christian, baptized or unbaptized, have their faces naturally turned away from God, till the preaching of God's testimony turns their faces towards Him. Then also if not actually worshipping images and idols, has not the heart idols? Covetousness is said to be idolatry. It is much to be feared that many of the professors of the present day have not learnt in the presence of God what idols mean. Anything that keeps a man away from God or Christ is an idol, and when converted the very action of the turning is the turning away from them to God.

God is set forth in His character, light and love. The light beams down from the face of God's glorified Son. The heart, formerly set on idols, is turned to the reality of God; judges itself. Idols are left; God's heart of love is understood as meeting every thing in the gift of His Son, and finds rest, perfect rest in the blood and in the person of Christ. God is now the object of the soul, not idols: His righteousness, as seen in His glorified Son, has been fully vindicated by the Cross, which has fully met His claims against the sinner, whilst it has been so positively glorified by that same work (Christ's obedience unto death), that it has glorified the man who accomplished it. It is therefore manifested for the believing sinner in the person of God's Son in heaven. The righteousness of God claims his complete justification, whilst the love of God gives him that Son of His, as His own present gift, setting him in present

connection with Him by the communication of His own life to the soul, so that in spirit he is already beyond death and judgment. Such a God is the God to serve; a blessed service, a service of liberty instead of a service of bondage and fear.

The Thessalonians, besides this, had been taught that God's Son had been rejected of this world, and was, in consequence, in heaven, and that before He came again to judge the world, He would come and take them away to heaven. Consequently they waited for God's Son from heaven, Jesus the Saviour, who had already actually delivered them from the wrath to come by His death on the Cross, and would finally and eternally deliver them at His coming for them before He came to the world for judgment.

And now, my reader, you only want to apprehend in power those two titles, "God's Son," and "Jesus," to send a thrill of joy through your soul. You are not told to wait for a judge coming to judge you. None of Christ's judicial titles are here. He is the judge; but for believers He is God's own Son set forth in His own relationship to the Father, coming to fetch them into the Father's house. (See John xiv., 1-3.) God's Son, too, has been raised from the dead, after He had fully met God's claims, raised from the dead out from under our sins, and the judgment they deserved, victor over the whole power of the enemy; the sure pledge, foundation, and assurance of our own triumph, and that His life of resurrection will be then applied to our bodies as it is now to our souls. And His name is "Jesus," *i.e.*, Jehovah, Saviour; telling of complete salvation. Now we are saved from the imputation of sin and its consequences. Now we are saved from sin's power by present faith in His name; then we shall be saved from the very presence of sin; our vile bodies will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and

fashioned just like unto His glorious body. How, then, can judgment touch the beloved saints of God? Truly we are thus delivered from coming wrath by God's Son, the Saviour coming, before He comes to judge the world, to take every believer to glory. But chapter iv. will give us further instruction on this point.

In chapter i. then, we have had the Apostle's song of praise in view of the fruits manifested in this dear young Thessalonian Assembly. And we can rejoice in our far distant day in reading it, learning by it the secret of the freshness of love manifested in the early church, and longing that some such fruits may be seen in our day.



CHAPTER II.

The Apostles's entrance in amongst the Thessalonians had not been in vain as witnessed by the Christians that had met with them. (see i. 7-9), and now in chapter ii. he recalls to their own memories that his entrance amongst them, and that of his fellow-labourers, had not been in vain. These servants of God remind these young saints; for their own instruction and blessing, of the characteristics of their own service amongst them. First, after having been shamefully entreated at Philippi, they had been bold to preach the Gospel of God with much contention. This exhortation had not been of deceit nor of uncleanness, nor in guile; but as God had put them in trust with the Gospel so they spoke, not as pleasing men, but God that tried their hearts.

Neither had they at any time used flattering words, nor a cloak of covetousness; nor of men had they sought glory, neither of themselves nor of others; when they might have been burdensome as the Apostles of Christ. But they had been gentle among them as a nurse cherished her children. So being affectionately desirous of them, they had been willing not only to impart to them the Gospel of God, but their own lives, so dear were the Thessalonians to them. As a proof of this they remind them how, in order not to be chargeable, they had laboured with their own hands night and day. Holily, justly, and unblameably, had they walked before the Thessalonians that believed, exhorting and comforting, and charging them, as a father his children, that they would walk worthy of the God that had called them unto His kingdom and glory. Blessed character of the servants of God of that day. Thank God for its written picture. May God raise up men like-minded, with

the double character of nurse and father as is exhibited here.

God was the object put before the Thessalonians. He had been their Saviour. They had turned to Him from idols. God was likewise their object to serve in contrast to idols, and now God is put before them as their pattern for walk, who had called them to His kingdom and glory. We know how He was manifested, (viz., in His Son), but it is blessed to see how the Apostle Paul led back the young converts to the source of all, so that they might be in *happy communion* with God Himself. He had begun his song of praise in chapter i, v. 2; and the stream had run on joined together with many "for's" till chapter ii, 13. And now he repeats again for this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when the Thessalonians had received the word they had received it not as the word of men, but as the Word of God; who effectually worked in all that believed; and so they were not merely followers of Paul, but of the churches of God which were in Judea. It was the same Word that had had common effect on their hearts; consequently they had suffered like things of their own countrymen, even as these Assemblies had of the Jews, who had both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets; and had persecuted the Apostles, neither pleasing God, and also acting contrary to all men, forbidding the Apostles to preach even to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway; for wrath had come upon them to the uttermost.

Thus in verse 6, chapter i., we see how the young Christians had been followers of the Lord and the Apostles, who put before them their own character in chapter ii. as a pattern, and also of the Assemblies of Christ in Judea; suffering like persecutions. And God, manifested in His Son, was the great pattern

of all ; who had called them to His kingdom and glory.

Verse 17. The Apostle then goes on to tell them how earnestly since his departure he had longed to see their faces, and had made one or two efforts to do so, but Satan had hindered him ; for what was the the hope of these servants of God, their joy, and crown of rejoicing ? Was it not even these dear converts in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming. Yes, they were the Apostle's glory and crown ? Sweet joy to take place at the coming of the Lord, when all the converted ones, and the servants of God who have been used to them shall meet together with the Lord !



CHAPTER III.

So, when he could *no* longer forbear, he thought it good to be left at Athens alone, (compare Acts xvii. 16-34,) and sent Timothy, his brother and servant of God and fellow-labourer in the Gospel of Christ, to establish them and comfort them concerning their faith, that no man should be moved by afflictions: for they themselves knew that they were appointed to the same. The Apostles had warned them of this indeed when they were with them, and it had come to pass as Paul had said. It was for this cause then that he had sent Timothy, that he might know the steadfastness of their faith, lest by any means the tempter should have had tempted them successfully, and the Apostle's labour should have been in vain.

Afflictions, then, are the portion of the saints, by which the tempter might take advantage, and the servant of God is sent at such a time for the comfort and establishment of the saints of God. (Compare 2 Cor., where this double thought of ministry is largely set forth).

Timothy, however, came back, and brought the Apostle glad tidings of the young saints' faith and love, that they remembered their fathers in the faith, desiring earnestly to see them, as they also did them. This greatly comforted the hearts of the Apostles, who were also suffering for Christ's sake. *They lived if the young converts stood fast in the Lord.*

These glad tidings that Timothy brought so filled the Apostle's heart with joy that he burst out, "What thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith."

Satan had hindered this joy being fulfilled (see ii.) and the Apostle is thrown on God and the Father, that He would direct his way to them. Mysterious power to hinder, but only producing increased dependence on the part of the servants of God on the superior power and direction of God and the Father, who would, in His time, bring to naught the devices of the enemy.

We had the coming of the Lord brought before us in the first chapter in connection with our introduction into the Father's house and our full salvation, in the second, as the joyful meeting place between the labourers and their children in the faith, their hope, joy, and crown of rejoicing. Here in chapter iii, it is brought in in connection with the walk of the believers, to stir them up to increased love one towards another. The Apostles pray that the Lord would make the dear young converts to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all, even as the Apostles love abounded toward them, to the end He might establish their hearts unblameable in holiness before God and the Father at the coming of the Lord with all His saints.

Here we have the second aspect of the coming of the Lord. He comes for His saints into the air, as we have seen. This part of His coming is connected wholly with grace and privilege. Second, He comes with His saints to judge the world; this is connected with walk and responsibility. Wherever in the Word the coming of the Lord is brought forward in connection with the hope of the children of God and their salvation, it is seen in the first stage. Whenever it is connected with responsibility, it is seen in the last stage. If all Canada were in rebellion against her Majesty the Queen, except a few loyal ones, and she was to send an army under the Prince of Wales to re-conquer the Dominion. Supposing he was to stop

at Bermuda on the way, and send for all her loyal subjects in Canada to meet him there, that would be a figure of the first stage of the coming of the Lord. He would then go on to Canada with them, re-conquer the Dominion, and distribute rewards to those who remained loyal to the Queen. This would represent the second stage of the Lord's coming. At that day, before the whole world, the saints will be manifested unblameable in holiness, and will receive the rewards of the kingdom. (Compare chapter iii. 12 with iv. 9-10.) "Towards all" means all the brethren. This explains the connection with holiness or separation from evil in the next verse.



CHAPTER IV.

In the second chapter the Apostles had put their example before the saints, for them to follow; now they beseech the saints and exhort them by the Lord Jesus, that according to that example and teaching, they should walk and please God, and abound more and more in it. They would have them be like Enoch, who walked by faith, realizing death passed for him on the slain lamb, and looking to be translated that he should not see death, and whilst waiting, walking with God, and having this testimony that he pleased God. (Compare Heb. xi. 4-5.)

The young Thessalonian converts knew what commandments the Apostles had given them by the Lord Jesus. It was the will of God, their full sanctification, which is divided in the following verses, 1st, in their being separated from fornication and all evil lusts; 2nd, to holiness; and 3rd, to love one another, which learning practically as we have seen above, their hearts would be established unblameable in sanctification before God and the Father at the coming of the Lord with all His saints. Fornication was rife in those heathen countries, a common sin; but the saints were to keep their vessels in sanctification and honour, not allowing their passions and lusts to have dominion over them as the heathen who did not know God; much less for any one to overreach his brother in such a matter, for the Lord was the avenger of all such; God had not called them to uncleanness, but to sanctification. It was not despising man, but despising God to do such things, who had given them His holy Spirit.

But, 3rd, their sanctification was bound up with brotherly love. We know we have passed from death

unto life because we love the brethren, and this carried out would be practical separation from the world. In fact it was to own the Father in contrast with the world. This was positive sanctification, they were taught of God to love one another, and indeed all the brethren in Macedonia (compare iii. 12,) but he besought them that they might increase more and more, and to do good and study to be quiet and to do their own business, and to work with their own hands (as the Apostles commanded them) that they might walk with honesty towards them that were without, and that they might have lack of nothing.

The coming of the Lord is now brought before the young saints to comfort them in connection with their departed relatives (chapter iv. 13-18.,) and in connection with this the two stages of it are distinctly brought out, 1st, to illustrate how the Lord will bring back with him to His kingdom those that have departed before, and 2nd, chapter v., to show the saints full salvation from the day of the Lord—the Day of Judgment—to the world. (Chapter v. 1-11.)

The Thessalonian believers had evidently but an indistinct notion of the Lord's coming. Paul and his helpers, as I have shown before, had left them at a very early stage, having given them the general hope of the Lord's coming without detail. Some of their brethren had in the mean time died. What had become of them? Would they partake of the blessings of the coming of the Lord? These were some of the questions that would arise in the young believers minds. They were taught about the Lord's coming back to take the kingdom. Would their departed brethren lose their reward? The Apostle now writes to comfort them and gives them full instruction. He would not have them ignorant concerning those that were asleep, that they might not sorrow as those that had no hope of seeing them

again; for if they believed that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that slept in Jesus would God bring with Him, when He returned to set up His kingdom over the earth.

But how return with Him, if they had died? The following verses are a parenthesis to show how this would take place. He said this to them by the word of the Lord, it was a revelation to him that, they which were alive and remained on the earth, at the time of the Lord's coming should not go before those that were asleep; for the Lord Himself would descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ should rise first; then those that were alive, and remained on the earth at this time, would be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so should dead and living be together for ever with the Lord. They would be thus all translated to the glory first, and then return together with the Lord when He came to set up His kingdom on earth. Thus instead of sorrowing, they were to comfort one another in this hope. They would rejoin one another in that day, yea the dead ones would be first to rise.



CHAPTER V.

The day of the Lord would indeed come to the world as a thief in the night. When they say peace, and safety then sudden destruction should come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they should not escape. But the brethren were not in darkness that that day should overtake them as a thief. They were all the children of the light and of the day; they were not of the night nor of the darkness. Therefore they were not to sleep as the others, but to be vigilant and sober, for they that slept, slept in the night, and drunkards were drunken in the night; but let those who were of the day be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation, for God had not appointed them to wrath, viz., the second stage of the Lord's coming, but to obtain salvation [the first stage] through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for them that whether sleeping or watching, they might live together with Him. Wherefore they were to comfort themselves with this blessed hope of a full salvation, of being caught up to meet their Lord in the air, before even the day of the Lord came. They were to build up and stablish one another in this thought. Blessed hope for the saints of God.

The day of the Lord is a common expression in Old Testament scripture, and invariably refers to the return of Messiah to the earth, to set up His kingdom. The Jewish hope was always connected with this, which went together with the destruction of their enemies (see Isaiah ii. 12 and xiii. 6-9, Joel ii. 31, Zech. xiv. 1-21., Matt. xxiv. 29-31.) The New Testament shows that the judgment of the living will take place then (Matt. xxv. 31,) as well as of all who have rejected Christ and followed Anti-Christ, who still live

in that day. (Rev. xix. xx.) But before that day, as we have seen, the Church will be safely housed in the Father's house by His returning Son, and completely saved as to their bodies by Jesus the Saviour, who will descend into the air, as we have seen at the end of chapter iv., and catch up all His own to meet Him there. The world and professing church who have rejected Him will be left behind to the delusions of Anti-christ and to the judgment at the day of the Lord. But more of this in the 2nd Epistle.

The Apostle concludes by beseeching his dear Thessalonians to know those who laboured in the Lord amongst them, who were over them in Him, and who admonished them, and to esteem them very highly for their works sake.

The Spirit of God had already raised up such in the midst of the Assembly, and the young saints were to know them. At the same time they were to be at peace amongst themselves.

The disorderly were to be warned, the feeble-minded comforted, the weak supported, whilst patience was to be shown towards all. There is more instruction as to the disorderly in the 2nd Epistle.

See that none render evil for evil unto any, but ever follow that which is good, both amongst yourselves and all. Rejoice evermore. (compare Psalm xxxiv, and the occasion of its being written ; also Phil. iv. 4.) Pray without leaving an interval, not merely at stated times. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God concerning you. These were individual exhortations to them.

The next three exhortations refer to their corporate place in the Assembly. The Holy Ghost had come down from the ascended Christ, who had been crucified on the Cross, and had builded these disciples together to be part of God's Assembly, to be

locally expressed in the place. *He* was then present in the Assembly to guide it. The Thessalonians were not to quench His action, which was like fire and light. Brethren might be endowed with the gift of prophecy (compare as to this 1 Cor. xiv.) The saints were not to put an extinguisher on His workings, to despise them. At the same time they were to prove all things, try the spirits whether they were of God, and hold fast that which was good. What a picture of an individual saint! An ever-rejoicing ceaseless praying, in all things thanking saint! What a picture of an Assembly! Ever guided by the Spirit; never despising ministry, at the same time proving all things and holding fast only the good! Lastly, they were to avoid every form of evil.

He prays that the God of peace might sanctify them wholly, and that their whole spirit, soul, and body [the whole man in his component parts] might be preserved blameless until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. God was faithful who had called them who also would do it (compare instruction as to sanctification with chapter iii. 12-13, iv. 1-10.) Blessed confidence for the servant of God in regard to his children in the faith. These blessed servants lastly ask the saints for their prayers. They were to greet the brethren with an holy (set apart) kiss. This letter was to be read to all the *holy* brethren, a needful word to young saints, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

A SHORT SUMMARY

OF

2 THESSALONIANS.



THE Second Epistle was written in view of false teachers, most likely Jews, who had represented to the suffering Thessalonians that the day of Christ had already come; their great tribulations being the proof of it. They also seem to have pretended (see chapter ii. 2) to have had authority by a letter from the Apostle Paul for saying so. This would be in every way calculated to shake the faith of the young Thessalonian converts, who, alas, by this time seem to have lost a little of the freshness of their first hope and joy, resulting from their faith in the return of the Lord.

The error, therefore, here was chiefly in connection with the day of the Lord, as in the first Epistle they had needed instruction on the coming of the Lord for His saints. Consequently the instruction in this 2nd Epistle is chiefly in reference to the second stage of the Lord's coming, as the 1st Epistle was chiefly in connection with the first. The day of the Lord is therefore viewed in the first chapter as the day of the righteous reward of the believers (the kingdom of God would then be manifested), and as the day of tribulation and judgment for the wicked who remained ignorant of God, and rejected the Gospel of Christ; in the second chapter it is viewed in refer-

ence to the apostacy of Christendom and the revelation of the Anti-christ, who is called the man of sin, and the lawless one. The Lord would then destroy him with the spirit of His mouth and the brightness of His coming, and destroy all who were deluded by him. In the 1st chapter the believers are encouraged in reference to the day of the Lord, that in that day they would be resting with the Apostles with Jesus in glory, of course already glorified, as we have seen in the 1st Epistle; and in the second chapter they are reminded that their gathering together unto Christ would take place before the day of the Lord, as also of the apostacy and revelation of the man of sin.

The Church is addressed, as in the 1st Epistle, in reference to its relationship with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. After giving the usual salutation of grace and peace, the Apostles, Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus, thank God for the saints because their faith grew exceedingly, and their love one to another abounded; so that they gloried in them in the Assemblies of God, for their patience and faith in all their persecutions and tribulations that they were enduring. These trials, as we have seen, the enemy was taking advantage of to cloud their hope, which is not spoken of here as a subject of praise by the Apostle, as in the 1st Epistle. The day of the Lord had already come, the arch-deceiver said by his emissaries. The poor suffering Thessalonians deceived were about to say, Well, what has become of our hope then? We had been taught that before that day we should be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Thus they were troubled, not only by the tribulations themselves through which they were passing, but by the deceptions of the enemy, and their hope was clouded. The Apostle does not allude directly to this till the second chapter; he is content in the first

to put things right in the minds of the Thessalonians by showing them that their present trials were only a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God coming on their persecutors in the day of the Lord, that they might be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which they suffered. In that day when the Lord Jesus should be revealed, it would be a righteous thing of God to recompense tribulation to their troublers, and those who were troubled rest with the Apostles. Blessed comfort for the saints! Instead of tribulation in that day it would be perfect rest with the Lord in bodies of glory, whilst it would be tribulation only for the wicked! Tribulation *now* was the portion of the saints.

It is the kingdom of God here of which he speaks, not its present, but its future place, when Christ should return and take the kingdoms of this world into His hands, and reign gloriously as the King over the whole earth. The heavenly saints would have their portion and sphere with Christ in it, they would reign over it, getting their rewards, having been previously translated to glory, as we have seen in the 1st Epistle. Hence the trouble to the wicked would come, and rest to the righteous, when the Lord Jesus Christ should be revealed with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obeyed not the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, who should be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord when He should come to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believed in that day.

It is then the second stage of the Lord's coming of which the Apostle speaks here, called the day of the Lord, and here the day of the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is a day of reward for the saints, a day of judgment to the world. All the living heathen who know not God, all the professing christians who

have not obeyed the gospel of Christ, will be punished in that day. It will be everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. Oh, careless reader, think of this; as sure as you are an immortal creature, born in sin, and finally rejecting Christ, so sure this must be the final result of a wilful rejection of Christ, viz.. "Everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." But, on the other hand, Christ in that day will be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe. All the realities of His wonderful Person will come out visibly then; all the wonders of God become a man will be seen in His face; the unaltered scars in His hands, feet, and side, resplendent with all His glory, will tell out the wonders of His love. All His beauteous unchanged moral qualities as seen on earth, and more wonderful as seen in the glory of heaven, will meet the admiring gaze of His ransomed ones, as they shout "Worthy the Lamb that was slain, to receive glory, honour, and power, for He hath redeemed us to God." Oh, my reader, what a wonderful thing to be there! I trust it is your portion. Assuredly it will be so if the Apostle's testimony has been believed.

In view of the solemn realities of that day, the Apostle prayed that the dear Thessalonian believers might be counted worthy of this calling and that God would fulfil in them all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the Name of their mutual Lord Jesus Christ might be honoured in them and they in Him, now and in that day according to the grace of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER II.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy, now turn to the subject of the letter that had been written to them, which was troubling their minds. The letter had purported to have been written by the authority of the Apostles. Paul writes positively to deny it. He beseeches them by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the fact of the gathering of the saints to the Lord Jesus when He should descend into the air, not to be troubled by such a letter, as if the day of the Lord was already come. The letter seemed to have had as its subject that, on account of the great tribulations the saints were going through, the day of Christ was present. The great tribulation that the Lord had spoken of must have come (compare Matt. xxiv. 21.) But *that*, as the Apostles had shown the saints in the first chapter was coming on the world not on the church; the church in that day would be at rest with the Lord. In this chapter they show the saints that it could not have come for two reasons, 1st, on account of the Lord's coming, and gathering of the saints to Him in the air; which had not yet taken place; 2nd, that before the day of the Lord, the man of sin would be revealed. That day shall not come the Apostle says, except there come first an apostacy, and the man of sin be revealed; 1st then Christendom must apostatize; 2nd, a man was to appear in the midst of the apostacy, who should, as God, sit in the temple of God, saying He was God. Sad and solemn news for the young saints to hear, yet re-establishing to their souls, for if the day of the Lord had come, and they were left, where was the promise of His coming into the air for them, which they had been taught would take place before that day?

Paul had already told them of that apostacy and manifestation of the man of sin when he was with them. There was a power withholding, hindering the manifestation of this evil. The mystery of iniquity, alas, was already working in the church, but the Holy Ghost was there, the great hindering power to its development, and He would let, until the Church with the Holy Ghost in it was taken to glory; then should that wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord should Himself destroy with the spirit of His mouth and with the brightness of His coming, literally "Epiphany of His coming," *i.e.*, the 2nd stage of the Lord's coming that we have spoken of. Now, before I go on, I wish my reader to notice the Apostle's sketch of the history of Christendom. It is a solemn seal put on the universal history of man's departure from God. The Church, as Israel was to fail as God's witness on earth. The mystery of iniquity had already begun to work in the days of the Apostles, which has since developed in Popery and rationalism. The Holy Ghost's presence in the church would hinder the full development of the apostacy and man of sin, until all that belonged to Christ's real body and bride were gathered out, then He and they would be taken out of the way by ascending to glory. Then would follow universal apostacy, then the man of sin would be revealed, sitting in God's temple literally at Jerusalem, as God; then the Epiphany of the Lord's coming would destroy him. Alas, alas, for man, it is his universal history: tried without law, he proved himself lawless; under law, a law-breaker: when Christ came he rejected Him; when the Holy Ghost came, he resisted Him; when He is taken out of the way He will set himself up as God in the earth. Dear reader, nothing can stand in the current of this universal departure from Christ as is pictured here, but Christ and known union with Him by the

Holy Ghost. May our increasing cry be that Christ's glory may be known, and that the saints may know their union with Him, standing as we do amidst the wreck and ruin of Christendom.

What a picture this gives of man's boasted progress! Why, my reader, it is progress backward, not forwards! The professing church is going back from Christ, and redemption, and union with Him by the Holy Ghost, to law, idolatry, rationalism, ritualism, and to Anti-christ! When Christ returns He will find all this full blown. Progress, indeed! Is this what your peace prophets are prophesying of, talking of a silvery line of progress into a golden millennium? Let God's word tear away the hypocritical veil, and show man up in all his horrid deformity! Let it unveil to him his Man-God sitting in Jerusalem's temple, energised with Satan's power and signs and lying wonders, working with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved: sitting in the midst of apostate Christendom united with apostate Judaism, declaring himself to be God! My reader, say not you will not be deceived in that day. If you are not a real Christian, and, consequently amongst the happy ones, who before this day of tribulation, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, you will be found amongst those whom God will hand over to a strong delusion to believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believe not the truth but have pleasure in unrighteousness.

I am aware many godly men since the Reformation and before have branded the Pope as the man of sin and the Anti-christ. But, much as I respect them as men of faith and power far above most of the present day, I cannot coincide with their judgment on this point. First, notwith-

standing all the departure from the faith that there has been, up to the present day the foundation of God standeth sure. Even in Rome and Greece they confess a true Christ, God and man, as the foundation of the church. But the rise of the man of sin in this chapter coincides with an apostacy that is to take place (see verse 3.) The foundations will be given up, and man will take the place of God and Christ upon the earth, not merely the place of being His vicegerent as the Pope does now. Second, the letting, hindering power to the mystery of iniquity is still on the earth. The advent of the lawless one does not come till after the removal of this hindering power, which I have no doubt is the presence of the Holy Ghost working in the real people of God on earth now. Third, the Anti-christ will deny the Father and the Son, as John says (chapter ii.) This, the Pope has not done yet. Fourthly, he does not rise till after the re-formation of the Roman empire, which has not taken place yet. (See Rev. xiii.1-11.) That the Pope is *an* Anti christ I have no doubt. That he blasphemously assumes the place of the Holy Ghost on earth, particularly since the dogma of Infallibility has been proclaimed, is most palpable. But that he is *the* Anti-christ is impossible, for the four reasons I have mentioned before. The Anti-christ of John, the wicked one of this chapter, the second beast of Rev. xiii.11, the false prophet of Rev. xix 20, and the wilful King of Dan, xi. 36-37, I believe coincide. The latter chapter seems clearly to show that he is a Jew, who will appear in the Land of Canaan after the temple is re-built, head the apostate Jews, and cause them to submit, and worship the image of the 1st beast of Rev. xiii.15, who is the last head of the revived Roman Empire. Babylon, or the Apostate harlot church of Rome, will still for some time keep her

seat in the West, till the ten kings destroy her. All Christendom will be deluded to believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness.

From this dark picture the Apostle turns to give thanks to God for those beloved young saints because that from the beginning He had chosen them to salvation from all this, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, unto which He had called them by their gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ had ascended into glory before His return, so would they be translated in the same manner before the day of tribulation and judgment of ungodly men to meet the Lord in the air, and to be introduced to the glory which is His. We are called *to the obtaining of the glory* of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must obtain that before ever one drop of judgment falls on an apostate church or world. In this salvation, present to their souls and future to their bodies, they were to stand fast, holding the traditions they had been taught, either by word or by Paul's epistle. He ends up by saying, Now our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father, which hath loved us and given us everlasting consolation and a good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work. Surely the hope of obtaining the glory of Christ was enough to comfort them amidst their tribulations, and the possession of the certainty of the salvation, was establishment itself to their souls.

CHAPTER III.

These honoured servants of God conclude the Epistle by asking prayer for themselves that the Word of God might have free course and be glorified, even as it was with the Thessalonians, and that they might be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for all men had not faith. But the Lord was faithful, who would stablish them and keep them from evil. They had confidence, too, that He would direct their hearts into the love of God and the patience of Christ, a needful lesson as the gloom thickened. If the world waxes darker in its hatred to Christ, the way to meet it is with the love of God; if the church departs further and further away, the thing is to meet it with the patience of Christ. But to do so, our hearts must dwell in these things ourselves. God loves unchangeably above, Christ waits in patience looking forward to His coming; we are called into the communion of this and to manifest the same spirit here below.

Verse 6-16 refer to disorderly or unruly walk amongst brethren. The extreme act of putting away is not in question here as in 1 Cor. v. There is discipline to be exercised short of this, which might result in blessed restoration. Any disorderly walk contrary to what the Apostle had written them in these Epistles, they were to mark, and to withdraw themselves from the brothers that engaged in it. The Apostles had not behaved themselves disorderly amongst the saints; they had not eaten any man's bread for naught, but had laboured and travailed night and day, that they might not be chargeable to any of the saints. Not because these servants had not the power, but to make themselves ensamples how the saints were to follow them, (Compare 1

Thess. ii.) Some of the saints had evidently in their first zeal perhaps, given up everything in view of the Lord's coming, and now without gift in service, were burdening the saints, and going about idly doing nothing. Now the Apostles had encouraged no such behaviour, they had commanded that if a man did not work neither should he eat. They heard in fact that there were some amongst the saints who were walking disorderly, working not at all, but were busy-bodies. Now such they exhorted by the Lord, that with quietness they should work and eat their own bread. But as for the brethren they were not to be weary in well-doing.

Now if any would not obey the Apostle's word by this Epistle, they should mark that man and keep no company with him, that he might be ashamed, yet not to count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Thus were all these minor questions settled by the wisdom of God in the Apostle. The unruly, disorderly, were to be warned (1 Thess. v. 14) admonished, withdrawn from, marked; yet not counted as enemies, that being made ashamed, they might judge themselves and communion with their brethren be restored. Such wholesome discipline is very important amongst young saints. Sad it is if any take sides with the disorderly and hinder the action of the Spirit of God.

'It is most needful for saints to understand things that differ in matters of discipline. All discipline is not a matter of excommunication. The object of all kinds of discipline is restoration, even in the case of putting away.

Putting away is treated of in 1 Cor. v. This is as to moral evil. But 2 John shows us that one not bringing the doctrine of the true Christ, is not to be received into our houses. In Rev. ii. 14, 15 the Lord finds fault also with the Assembly at Pergamos for not

putting out those who held Balaam doctrine, and those that turned the grace of God into licentiousness. This is most needful to press in the present day. A heretic, a leader of sects, was also after a first and second admonition, to be rejected. (Titus iii. 10.) But then there is a secondary discipline to be followed, as we see above, which is also most needful to be discerned.

There is the discipline likewise mentioned in 1 Tim. v. 20. which likewise comes short of putting away. But then every one has not the power to carry this out, viz., "Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear."

Lastly, there is the individual withdrawal, mentioned in 1 Tim. vi. 3-6, which, I trust to allude to with more length when writing on that Epistle.

The Lordship of Christ is here brought in in our Epistle. He is the Lord of peace, to give peace always by all means, even if it might need be by discipline. The Apostle lastly prays that the Lord might be with all the saints. Others most likely wrote the Epistle as ordered by the Apostle, but Paul signed it with his own hand, the token in every Epistle as to what was his. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

