

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS LESSON 4 (2 Thessalonians)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). Welcome to our study of the Book of 2 Thessalonians. This book deals with some perversions that would be taking place (some from within the body of Christ, and some from without) while the Second Coming of Christ was being discussed among the Christians in Thessalonica. The first perversion with which Paul deals is the idea that when Jesus comes, it will be a happy day because everyone everywhere will be saved. But that is simply not true. The Bible clearly teaches that the Second Coming of Christ will be a horrible, dreadful day—a day of vindication for God among ungodly people and those who think they have obeyed the Gospel, but have not. Notice the words of 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.

“Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.”

This passage clearly teaches that everyone everywhere will **not** be saved. Everyone who simply looks up into Heaven and says the name of Jesus will not be saved. Everyone who claims to be a child of God will not be saved. There are many who are going to be lost who thought that they were right. The Bible clearly teaches that few will be saved. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Do we really understand the biblical definition of “few”? In the days of Noah, “few” meant eight souls out of the world’s entire population. Do not think to yourself that on the day when Jesus comes back, everyone will be saved so that it will be a happy day when everyone rejoices and shouts. That is not the idea. It will be a day of retribution at God’s hand. God is going to “repay with tribulation those who have troubled you.” This means first and foremost that the ungodly, the critics of Christianity, those who have persecuted The Way, and those who have done evil are going to be repaid with tribulation. It will be a troublesome day for those who said that there is no God. They will be sad and sorrowful at that day. Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is the Christ, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). For those who have persecuted Christianity, God will now persecute them. In Romans 12:17-21 God told us not to render vengeance for vengeance because He will repay by reaping His own vengeance on that day.

We also notice that the Lord is coming “in flaming fire” to “take vengeance on the ungodly.” When Christ comes, it will be a day of destruction. In Matthew 24:34-36 we find that the world will come to an end. In 2 Peter 3:10-12 similar language is used when Peter says that the Earth, and all that is in it, will be melted with a fervent heat. When Christ comes, it will be the end. The final curtain will fall, and there will be no more opportunities. Why will Christ come “in flame fire”? He will come to take vengeance on two types of people—those who do not know God, and those who have not obeyed the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Who are these people? Those who “do not know God” are those who are not in a relationship with Him. To “know God” means that a person is a child of God. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32). Those who have never come to know God are those who have never obeyed the Gospel, and thus are not Christians. When the Lord returns, every person who has not been obedient to the Gospel will perish—not in the sense that they will be annihilated, but in the sense that they will reap the wrath of God and will suffer eternal torment because of their bad choices in this life. God does get angry. Psalm 7:11 tells us that God is angry with the wicked every day. The day of the Lord’s Second Coming will be the day when God reaps vengeance on this ungodly, immoral world. But there also is a second class—those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I do not think that in the second part of verse 7 Paul is talking about those who have never obeyed the Gospel by being baptized, but rather is speaking about those who do not continue to obey the Gospel. There are two classes under discussion here: (1) those who have never obeyed the Gospel; and (2) those who did not continue to obey the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Obedying the Gospel occurs initially when a person becomes a Christian. But that is not the end. Our lives must be lives of continual obedience to the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Romans 6:3-4 tells us that after we have been baptized in obedience to the Gospel, we must rise to walk “in newness of life.” We have been given a second chance. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). There is no doubt that we have been given a second chance. But with that second chance, we must every day arise and live faithfully to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The sad thing is that people get the idea that when they have obeyed the Gospel, it is all over because they have completed God’s will. No, they have not. They have just begun to do God’s will, and now must follow through by being “faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10). They must follow through by giving their lives to Christ every day. Do you realize that when you obey the Gospel, you are no longer your own? In 1 Corinthians 6:20, “You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God.” To whom do we belong? We are no longer our own. Life is no longer about us. We were “bought at a price.” What was that price? It was the blood of Jesus Christ. The shedding of His blood paid the price for our sins. Therefore, we are told to glorify God in our body and in our spirit “which are His.” To obey the Gospel, we must be living sacrifices every day (Rom. 12:1-2). We must have the mentality of the apostle Paul, who said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Being faithful to the Gospel means that we must live a sacrificial life day after day. And when we find ourselves in sin, we must make it right. Like Simon, we must repent and pray to God that the evil thought of our hearts might be forgiven us. We see from 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 that the Second Coming of Christ will be a day to which Christians look forward. It will not be a day of sadness or sorrow for Christians. It will be a day of vindication for God; there is no doubt about that. But it also will be a wonderful day, because it is the hope that each child of God has in this life.

In 2 Thessalonians 2 we see another perversion discussed that will occur before Christ's Second Coming. The "man of sin" must be revealed. In 2 Thessalonians 2 there are ten characteristics given of the man of sin. I want to identify those characteristics, and then relate them to what God is saying will continue until the Second Coming of Christ. What is the man of sin like? In verse 3 we read that a falling away from the faith will occur first. The first characteristic, then, is that a falling away must happen. This "falling away" is a departure from the original pattern of the apostles' doctrine and teaching (Acts 2:42). It is an apostasy from the faith. In New Testament times there were several different "falling aways." In the Book of Acts we see the falling away of certain Jewish Christians who fell away by trying to bring in things from the Law of Moses (such as, for example, circumcision). As a result, they fell away from the faith by trying to add things from the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ. Christ's Law is sufficient; circumcision no longer is needed (Gal. 5:4-6). There is the falling away that occurred in the first century that was related to Gnosticism. This was the idea that people needed secret, special knowledge that only a certain select few possessed, and that people had to go to them for that truth. This idea represented a falling away from the truth because Gnosticism was not true. Were those the falling aways that are being discussed in 2 Thessalonians? No, they were not because those do not still exist up until today, which is one characteristics of the man of sin. Was there then another falling away? If we turn our attention to 1 Timothy 4:1-5 we will see that

"the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving."

What is this falling away? It is a departure from the Spirit's words. It is a departure from the original pattern. The people who fell away were forbidding people to marry, and were commanding people to abstain from certain meats. What does that sound like—which still exists today? It sounds like the papacy and the Roman Catholic Church. The "man of sin" is the papal order and the Roman Catholic Church, both of which represented departures from the original pattern. It was at work during the first century. There already were some who were forbidding people to marry (priests had to be celibate and could not marry), and who were forbidding people to eat of certain meats (like on "meatless Fridays," which the Catholic Church instituted). This, then is the first characteristic.

The second characteristic in 2 Thessalonians 2 is that from a first-century vantage point, this sinister force was yet to be revealed. It was in the works, and was coming. But it had not yet been fully been revealed. The Catholic Church did not fully take its shape until A.D. 606 with Pope Boniface III. The seeds of the Catholic Church were there, but it was still a future thing that was yet to be revealed in the full, sinister force that later would become the papacy and Roman Catholicism.

The third characteristic is that the persecuting power is designated as "the man of sin" because sin is its predominant quality. This was "the son of perdition" or "the man of sin." The idea is that sin, perdition, and destruction are its dominant quality. That is what it is bringing. It will lead to a life of sin for some. It will promote sin. It will not refute sin. In Catholicism, you pay a price as penance in order to get someone out of a life of sin (or even out of Purgatory, so Catholics believe). Thus, the man of sin is something that promotes sin, as opposed to telling people to abstain from sin in order to do away with in.

The fourth characteristic is that the man of sin opposes God and exalts himself against all that is genuinely sacred or holy. The man of sin opposes God. When the pope speaks "ex cathedra," he is supposed to be speaking for God. He is "the vicar of Christ," which means that he is supposed to be Christ's replacement on Earth. Some people call him

“Lord God the Pope.” They also call him “Holy Father.” This is a man who clearly opposes God, and exalts himself against all that is holy and sacred. When someone has to bow down, kiss the ring of another man, and call him “Holy Father,” that is clearly something that is opposed to God and what is holy. How do we know that? In Matthew 23:9 Jesus said, “Call no man Father, for one is your Father in heaven.” Jesus was not talking about something in a physical sense. He was talking about a religious sense. But what about Peter? Catholics teach that Peter was the first pope. That is not true. In Acts 10 Cornelius called for Peter, who then went to Cornelius. Cornelius was so overwhelmed that a Jew would come to him that he fell down to worship him. But what did Peter say? Did he say, “Don’t you like my hat? Here’s my ring. Won’t you kiss it? No. Peter said, “Stand up. I myself am also a man.” The papacy and Roman Catholicism are not from God. They oppose God, and exalt that which is unholy and untrue.

The fifth characteristic is that in some sense, the man of sin will sit in the temple of God as God. When the pope sits in his chair and speaks *ex cathedra*, he is speaking in the place of God. For many people, when they think of where God is or the temple of God, they think of the Roman Catholic Church. That is not true. The temple of God is not made with hands (Acts 7:48-50). The temple of God is found within each Christian as we are faithful to God (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The temple of God today is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 12:25-27). If in some sense the man of sin will sit in the temple of God as God, and that does not describe the papacy, then what it does describe.

The sixth characteristic identified in 2 Thessalonians 2 says that the man of sin will deceive those who do not love the truth, by virtue of lying wonders and signs. Think of the signs that you often hear discussed related to Catholicism. Not long ago I saw a news story about a shadow that some people had viewed, and considered to be of the virgin Mary (who was crying). Someone bought a piece of toast off eBay for \$15,000 that supposedly looked like the virgin Mary. The idea is that these are supposed to be signs. But signs in the Bible were not glimpses or vague images. If you look at a cloud long enough, you can see something in it. If you look at a shadow long enough, you can get something out of it. We are not talking about vague glimpses of something that people think might represent something holy. In the Bible, signs were clearly identified as being undeniable. In Acts 4 the critics admitted that a notable sign had been done. They were unable to deny it, so they decided to take the apostles and beat them in order to dissuade them from doing such things any more. But these are not the signs that you see occurring in Catholicism today. Those types of signs deceive people.

The seventh characteristic is that the early stages of this apostasy were already at work in the church (2 Thess. 2:7). We can see that this was the case. In 1 Timothy 4 we learn that some were already teaching people to abstain from certain meats, and were forbidding certain people to marry. When we look just a little bit past the first century, we learn from church history that one bishop (elder) who had departed from the faith had set himself up as the “head bishop” over several congregations. That was happening, even though it was against God’s will. In Acts 14:23 we are told that there were to be elders in every church. Yet we see the seeds of apostasy already at work in the New Testament. When we look just a little past that, we can see the papacy beginning to occur.

The eighth characteristic had to do with something that, during Paul’s day, was restraining the man of sin and holding him back. The man of sin had not completely formed and come to fruition. There were many who remained faithful. Things were not the way God wanted them to be, especially that close to the New Testament age. But at least the man of sin was being opposed and was not allowed to go forward full force. It was restrained in some fashion. But verse 9 tells us that the restraining force would eventually be taken out of the

way, which would permit the man of sin to work more freely. It may be the case that the Roman government was the restraining factor. When the Roman Caesars (who thought of themselves as gods) were removed, and when the Council of Nicea and Constantine came upon the scene, then the era of Roman dominance and persecution ended, allowing the papacy to move forward more freely.

The tenth characteristic related to the man of sin had to do with the fact that although he had roots in the ancient world, he would endure in some form or another to the end of time and the Second Coming of Christ. This is why we know that the man of sin was not Judaism or Gnosticism. Whatever the man of sin was, he would exist until the Second Coming, at which time the Lord Himself would destroy him. Catholicism, which began in the first century, flourished when the Roman rulers (who viewed themselves as deities) were removed. But Christ will come one day to destroy the man of sin, who will still exist at that time. I say these things because I have concern for your soul. Catholicism is not of God. It is the man of sin. It is the son of perdition. It is opposed to that which is true, holy, and right.

There is a third perversion discussed in the Book of 2 Thessalonians. In chapter 3 we see that this perversion deals with the fact that some thought that Christ was coming back so soon that they simply stopped what they were doing and gave up. Some thought that everyone would be saved. Then there was the perversion of the man of sin. And then there was the perversion of Christians giving up, being lazy, and not getting out and living faithfully in every area of their lives. Some evidently had quit their jobs. Paul said that if a man did not work, then he ought not to eat. Some had given up and gotten lazy. So Paul gave specific instructions for such people. How were the Christians to deal with this problem? In 2 Thessalonians 3:6 we read, "We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us." Paul saw this as a very serious matter. Look at the influence such a thing would have on the world. If people were to see Christians (who are supposed to be above the world) living worse than those in the world by being lazy and refusing to do what they should, what kind of effect would that have? Paul told faithful Christians to withdraw from such people so that others would know that Christianity did not condone such actions. If people walk disorderly, then they are not in fellowship with God, and faithful Christians cannot fellowship them.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12 Paul said, "We hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread." Paul had heard the report that some Christians (who should have been the hardest workers; Eccl. 9:10; Col. 3:24) had quit their jobs, gotten lazy, and were being worse than those people in the world. In 1 Timothy 5:8 we are told that if a man will not take care of his own family, he is worse than an infidel. These Christians were doing that very thing because they were confused concerning the Second Coming. Their idea was, "What's the use of going to work tomorrow? The Lord might come at any minute." So they just gave up. In 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, Paul therefore offered a final admonition. How should Christians deal with someone who is walking disorderly, and who will not obey God's commands? How do Christians relate to such a person? Paul said, "If anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Paul said that Christians should "note" such people and not keep company with them. What did Paul mean by that? In 1 Corinthians 5 we see a similar example. There was a man in the church in Corinth who had a disgusting, heinous sin in his life. He had taken his father's

wife. The church seemed to think that everything was OK. They might not have agreed with his sin, but they thought, "We are bigger than that, and we can overlook it." Paul said, "No, you cannot. You need to withdraw from that ungodly man." Verses 11-14 of 1 Corinthians 5 clearly teach that Christians cannot even eat with such a person. They are not to keep company with him. He is to be ostracized from the fellowship of the church because such a person has already cut himself off by living unfaithfully. Does this mean that we hate such a person, or that every time we see the person we scowl at him or say ugly things about him? Of course not. We admonish him. We do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother in Christ. Withdrawal of fellowship (church discipline) is God's way of bringing the lost back. And it works. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul told the Christians in Corinth to withdraw from that ungodly man and to deliver him to Satan. They did that. And when we go to 2 Corinthians 2:8, we see Paul saying, "I urge you to reaffirm your love to him." The Christians in Corinth withdrew fellowship from the man, and it worked. The man then was restored, and Paul told them to reaffirm their love to him, comfort him, forgive him, and bring him back into the fold.

What are some of the problems that we are facing in the body of Christ today? We are not willing to practice church discipline like we ought to. We would rather sit around the Thanksgiving or Christmas table with ungodly members of the church (and possibly some in our own families) than to stand up and do what is difficult by withdrawing fellowship from those people. We have to follow through if we have any love for their souls.

Three perversions are mentioned in 2 Thessalonians. There is the perversion that when Christ comes back, everyone will be saved. That is not true. The Lord will return to take vengeance on those who do not know God (those who are not Christians) and on those who do not live faithfully to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is the perversion that began in the first century, and that is still at work today—the papacy and the Roman Catholic Church (which teaches that the pope is God on Earth, and that people must go through him to obtain salvation). The third perversion is the idea that Christ is going to return so soon that we simply need to give up on life. We must be faithful all the days of our lives.

Are you a New Testament Christian? Are you **sure** you are ready for the Second Coming of Christ? There is nothing left to restrain Christ from returning. He could come at any time. We do not know when it will be. Matthew 24:34-36 says that no one knows the day or the hour of His return. We therefore need to **get** ready and **stay** ready. Are you sure you are ready for the Second Coming of Christ? Have you obeyed the Gospel? In Acts 18:8 the Bible says that "many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized." Have you heard the Word of God (Rom. 10:17)? Have you believe in Jesus for salvation (Jn. 3:16)? Have you repented of those things in your life that are not right (Lk. 13:3)? Have you confessed the name of Jesus before men (Rom. 10:10; Mt. 10:32-33)? Have you been baptized into Christ? In Ephesians 1:3 we are told that all spiritual blessings are in Christ. In 2 Timothy 2:10-12 we are told that salvation is in Christ. It is in Christ that all spiritual blessings are found, and where salvation is found. If a person is outside of Christ, how does he get into Christ? Galatians 3:27 says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." The only way to get into Christ is through baptism. After a person has been baptized, he must walk in newness of life and must be faithful unto death so that he can look forward to, and have hope in, the Second Coming. Is the Second Coming something that motivates you? Or is it something that scares you? If your life is not right, it will be a dreadful day. But if you are ready, what a wonderful day it will be when Christ comes back to receive us all.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS LESSON 4 (2 THESSALONIANS)

1. According to this lesson, what is the overall topic of discussion of the Book of 2 Thessalonians?
2. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul deals with three perversions related to the Second Coming of Christ. What is the first of those perversions with which the apostle deals?
3. According to 2 Thessalonians 1:8, on what two groups of people will Christ take vengeance when He returns?
4. In Philippians 2:10-11, what did Paul say will happen when Christ returns?
5. According to Romans 12:17, what are Christians today not supposed to do?
6. According to Romans 12:19, whose job is it to render vengeance on the ungodly?
7. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul deals with three perversions related to the Second Coming of Christ. What is the second of those perversions with which the apostle deals?
8. What is the first characteristic associated with the man of sin?
9. What is the second characteristic associated with the man of sin?
10. What is the third characteristic associated with the man of sin?
11. What is the fourth characteristic associated with the man of sin?
12. What is the fifth characteristic associated with the man of sin?
13. What is the sixth characteristic associated with the man of sin?
14. What is the seventh characteristic associated with the man of sin?
15. What is the eighth characteristic associated with the man of sin?
16. What is the ninth characteristic associated with the man of sin?
17. What is the tenth characteristic associated with the man of sin?
18. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul deals with three perversions related to the Second Coming of Christ. What is the third of those perversions with which the apostle deals?
19. What does 1 Timothy 5:8 have to say regarding a man who will not take care of his own family?
20. What command did Paul give in 1 Corinthians 5:11 regarding a man from whom Christian fellowship had been withdrawn?