

2 Thessalonians – Lesson 20

Paul's Final Words to the Thessalonians

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:16-17

- (a) What is Paul's *primary point* in the admonitions of 3:7-12? How did Paul "*imitate*" (v. 9) being a faithful worker in Christ?

Paul's primary point in these *imperatives* is that Christians should, *by virtue of their understanding of a Christian theology of work*, desire to do all that God has called them to do in the financial sphere. Namely, to *not* be idle and live off the largesse of others, but to work steadily with their hands, provide for their families, and help to advance the cause of Christ *even with their money*. Paul did this: he worked to support himself and gave himself to the preaching and teaching of the gospel. The Thessalonians should *imitate* him in this; they should strive to follow the example of the apostle in financial matters, looking out *for the welfare of others over themselves*.

- (b) Why does Paul believe that Christians should *not* "*grow weary*" (v. 13) in doing good?

Paul is convinced that Christians should not "*grow weary*" in doing the above because they understand the *value* of work, that work is a part of the human experience (i.e., as given to Adam), and that Christ has *redeemed* work to a higher goal and purpose. Namely, work is to be seen by the Christian as something that helps advance the cause of Christ. Not just toil, work is, for the believer, a means to glorify God through the use of material things to advance *his* work in the world.

- (a) Define the word "*peace*" as used *twice* in v. 16. How does Paul use it in Romans 5:1; 1 Corinthians 7:15; Galatians 5:22; and Ephesians 2:14?

Peace is, biblically, a new relationship between God and man, or, more particularly, between God and his elect people. It *does not* mean simply a "cessation of hostilities," but is the new relationship between God and his people by virtue of Christ taking away the wrath of God from over them and drawing them into an adopted relationship with a heavenly Father. In Romans 5:1, Paul says we have this peace because we have been justified by faith; our new relationship with God flows out of his legal declaration of our righteousness, imputed to us in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 7:15, Paul speaks of peace even in the broken relationships we have with others; that even those whose *earthly* relationships break down, we can still have peace with God and peace with others. In Galatians 5:22, Paul includes peace within the fruit of the Spirit that flows out of the one born-again by him; an ability, by virtue of our new standing before God, to make peace with others and to live in a state of peace. And, in Ephesians 2:14, Paul makes *Jesus* the source of our peace; he is the one who has broken down the walls of hostility between us and God, and our peace is found *only in him*.

- (b) Who is the "*Lord of peace*?" How is this an *apt description* of Christ and his work?

Christ Jesus is the Lord of peace; it is *his* work that has made peace possible for us. It is the propitiation of Jesus on the cross that has "*averted*" the wrath rightly due to us to him, and we are now free from any condemnation before God on account of our sinfulness. And, we are now made *full* sons and daughters of the Father, as Christ has led us into his presence. However, Jesus is also the Lord of peace in that he continues to "*broker*" this peace for us, *even as we continue to act in ways contrary to it*. Jesus sits at the right hand of his Father *advocating* (interceding) for us. It is Jesus who "*steps between*" the anger of the Father in our sinfulness to *continually* avert it from us. Jesus is the Lord of peace, for he *continually* and *eternally* makes us right with God.

(c) Why would such a *benediction* be appropriate for the Thessalonian believers? How would this peace *apply* to their situation?

Given that the Thessalonians continued to experience *massive opposition*, and even persecution from those around them, such a benediction is appropriate: just as you suffer in this world, and “seem” to have no peace, Christ has made *true peace* for you. Not just a “temporary” peace, but an *eternal* one, where a relationship with God has been perfectly secured. And, this peace is *the greater one*, giving them comfort *on an eternal level*, even though their lives in Thessalonica would continue to be difficult.

3. (a) What do *you* believe Paul meant when he wrote to them “*the Lord be with you all?*”

Paul is asking for the *presence* of the Lord to continue to abide with them, *even though he is not physically present*. Such presence is, of course, accomplished by the Spirit who abides with them. This “being” with them is designed to give them *continuing comfort* in the face of trouble.

(b) In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, why did Jesus say that he would “*be with you always?*” How is his *presence* an element of this Commission?

The advancement of the gospel into the world, such that the elect from every tribe, tongue, and nation are found and drawn to Christ, *cannot be accomplished by believers alone*; the work of salvation is “beyond” the scope of human endeavor, and is (ultimately!) a divine work. As Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and make disciples, his promise to be “*with*” them was actually a promise *that he would go “through” them in this work*; they would simply be the *means* that *he* would use to advance the gospel. Or, more specifically, the presence of the Spirit in and through them would be the agent of evangelism; his *continuing* presence (by the Spirit) would accomplish the task he was giving them.

(c) From John 14:15-21, *how exactly* is Christ “*with*” the believer now? What is the *intention* of his presence amongst his followers?

Although the risen Jesus sits in heaven at his Father’s right hand, and is *not* (himself) physically present, the Spirit is his presence. Given that the Father, Son, and Spirit all share of the same *nature* (yet being distinct in *Person*), the presence of the Spirit is the presence of the Son. The *intention* of the Spirit being present is to *expand* the work beyond the “physical” limitations of a single person. In other words, the disciples, with the Spirit, would multiply and “fan out” across the world to do what a single man could not. Christ returned to his Father and then “multiplied” himself through his Spirit in the lives of *millions*, spreading out throughout the world and preaching the gospel in every nation and tongue.

(d) What are some ways that the *presence* of Christ is *real* in our lives today (see Galatians 5:22)?

Christ is “real” in our lives today by virtue of the *fruit* that flows from us of the Spirit within us. The work of sanctification within us, as the Spirit fills our lives with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control, *is* the reality of Christ. The Spirit *transforms* us into the very nature *of Christ himself*, and so Christ is “present” as we become more Christlike.

4. (a) Compare v. 17 with 2:1-2. Why does Paul say that he wrote the greeting “*with [his] own hand?*”

Given that the Thessalonians had received some “other” sort of correspondence *claiming* to be from Paul, he takes measures to *assure them* that this letter was *officially* from him. He *seals* the letter by signing his name to it, something the Thessalonians may have been familiar with and would *recognize* in seeing here. In other words, Paul doesn’t want them to be confused *again*, so he takes steps to assure it doesn’t happen.

(b) Does this verse imply that Paul *literally* wrote the letter himself (see Romans 16:22)? If he used an *amanuensis*, how can he say that “*this is the way I write?*”

Just as in Romans, the use of an *amanuensis* (i.e., a writing secretary) is possible for this letter; it does *not* detract from the *authenticity* of it. As Paul would dictate, the amanuensis would take down his *exact* words, and so it is *irrelevant* if Paul actually *wrote* the words or simply spoke them. In either case, they are *his own words*, and Paul can *honestly* say that this is the way he “wrote.”

5. What do you think is the most *significant* topic addressed in this letter? What *changes* in your life have you implemented in considering it?

In my opinion, the most important topic of this letter is the *connection* between the impending return of Christ and the responsibility of the Christian to *continue to work* while anticipating it. In my experience amongst the more “fundamentalist” elements of Christendom, the *extreme* focus on eschatology is *precisely* the same as the focus of the Thessalonians: a *rabid* desire to talk about the “end times,” which leaves many *unable* to do any good work *in the here-and-now*. Christians *certainly* are to be living in anticipation of Christ’s return, but also dutifully doing what Christ demands of us *in the moment*. The advancement of the kingdom requires us to be preaching and teaching the gospel, not just talking about raptures and tribulations! Paul gives *excellent* instructions here for believers: keep looking up, but don’t trip over the things of this world in doing so!