

Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians and to Timothy

*"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father."
—I Thessalonians 1:2,3*

Our present lesson will be a brief overview of four of Apostle Paul's epistles, two to the Thessalonian church and two to his beloved Timothy. Although these four letters appear next to each other in Bible order, they were actually written at quite different times during Paul's ministry. According to most scholars, of the fourteen epistles of Paul recorded in the Bible, I Thessalonians was either

the first or second written [some conclude that Galatians was the first], while II Timothy was the last, written shortly before he was put to death at Rome. Therefore, about fifteen years

elapsed between the writing of I Thessalonians and II Timothy.

First Thessalonians

The church of Christ at Thessalonica was faithful in their service to the Lord, and as noted in our opening verses, Paul commended the brethren for this. Verse eight of this opening chapter reveals why Paul specially referred to their “work of faith, and labour of love.” “From you,” he wrote, “sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia [Greece], but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.”

The Thessalonian brethren were evidently Gentile converts, for Paul speaks of their having “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” (I Thess. 1:9) In verse ten he speaks of their waiting for “his Son from heaven, whom he [God] raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” The “wrath” referred to is the sentence of death that rests upon all mankind because of sin. The consummation of this sentence is reached at death, so Paul refers to it as the wrath “to come.” All believers are delivered from this death, by faith being justified to life through Christ. They die, seemingly, as others, but not actually so, for they lay down their justified lives and die sacrificially as Jesus did, being “planted together in the likeness of his death.” —Rom. 6:5

Unlike many of Paul’s epistles, his letters to the brethren at Thessalonica say nothing of the controversies raised in the Early Church resulting

from the incoming Gentile converts. Evidently the Thessalonian brethren had not been affected by these questions. Aside from words of encouragement along various lines, the principal doctrinal theme of both these letters centers around the church's hope of the Second Coming of Christ.

He mentions this glorious hope in I Thessalonians 1:10, 2:19, and 3:13. Vitally important truths pertaining to the return of Christ are presented in I Thessalonians 4:14-18 and 5:1-5. Paul writes, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." (I Thess. 4:16) These are symbolisms of the Bible, and the reference is not to a literal "shout" that rends the air, nor is the "voice" of the archangel a literal voice. Paul did not mean that Jesus would be blowing a literal trumpet when he returned.

In the last verse of chapter four Paul wrote, "comfort one another with these words." Part of this comfort is found in the opening verses of chapter five. Here the apostle reminds the brethren of certain conditions to come about in future "times and seasons." These would be associated with the Day of the Lord and closely related to the return of Christ spoken of in chapter four.

Paul wrote, "Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But

ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.”—I Thess. 5:1-6

In this brief review of the epistle, we call attention to the “shout,” the “voice,” and the “trumpet,” that Paul associates with the return of Christ. These symbolic evidences of his coming are discerned, the apostle says, only by the “brethren” who are watching, otherwise the resulting Day of the Lord would not come upon the world as “a thief in the night.”

Thieves do not blow trumpets and shout to announce their presence, but in this lesson we are told of a shout, a voice, and a trumpet that are not heard by the world in general. Their messages, nevertheless, are symbolically heard by the Lord’s people, “children of the day,” who are not asleep, but watching. Thus, Paul wrote, “Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”

Second Thessalonians

Paul’s second letter to the brethren at Thessalonica was written in an effort to correct a misunderstanding concerning the Second Coming of Christ that had arisen as a result of his first epistle. Immediately after his opening salutation, he mentions the subject of our Lord’s return and some of its implications. Then in the opening of the second chapter he comes right to the point.

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering

together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us [a reference to his first epistle], as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except [until] there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”—II Thess. 2:1-4

The implications of this statement are clear. In his previous epistle Paul had written that as far as the unbelieving world was concerned, the Day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night; that is, unknown except by those on watch. From this, some in the church at Thessalonica developed the idea that this time had already come, and that they were highly favored to be among those who knew about it.

Paul did not say to these that they were wrong in their understanding of the manner of the Lord's return, or that the Day of the Lord would be unknown to the world. He did not say to them that they were wrong because when the Lord returned there would be a symbolic shout, voice, and sound of a trumpet. The apostle also did not say they were wrong in believing that the Day of the Lord would bring much travail and destruction.

Paul's reply implied that they were correct as to the manner of Christ's return and of the Day of the Lord. His only argument against the claim that he had already returned at that time was that according to the prophecies an important intervening

event must first occur. He described this as a “falling away,” or apostasy from the faith, and the development of a great Antichrist system.

Later in the same chapter he indicated that this “mystery of iniquity” was already working in his day. (II Thess. 2:7) How true that was! Looking back over church history, it is readily discernible that not long after the apostles all fell asleep in death the purity of doctrine and simplicity of practice established among Christians by these inspired servants were soon lost.

A great church system developed, united with civil governments, and designated itself the kingdom of Christ—Christendom. However, it was a counterfeit of the true kingdom that was to be established when Christ returned. In the continuance of his lesson, Paul explained that when Christ did return, the brightness of his presence would bring about the destruction of this “mystery of iniquity.”

In II Thessalonians 2:8 the real import of the text is concealed by a faulty translation of the Greek word *parousia*. In the text it is translated “coming.” Its real meaning is “presence.” (See *The Emphatic Diaglott*; *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*; *Young’s Literal Translation*.) Thus Paul in verse eight is speaking of the “brightness” of the Lord’s presence. In his great prophecy, Jesus had said that his return and resulting presence [Greek: *parousia*] would be as a bright shining that would extend from the east even unto the west.—Matt. 24:27

In these prophetic words of Jesus, we see that his return and subsequent presence would be accompanied by a great increase of knowledge

throughout the earth symbolized, he says, by light. It is this increase of knowledge along all lines, and particularly as it pertains to the Truth of God's Word, which reveals to the watchers that the Day of the Lord is here.

Going further than this, the increase of knowledge and the breaking down of superstitions and long-held Dark Age teachings are some of the chief contributing causes of the disintegration of the systems of Christendom. As the light of Truth resulting from this Day of the Lord continues to penetrate into the recesses of human thought, religious systems built upon foundations of error and superstition will crumble.

First Epistle to Timothy

Unlike most of Paul's writings, his epistles to Timothy were not written to a congregation, but to an individual brother in Christ, affectionately referred to by the apostle as "Timothy, my own son in the faith." (I Tim. 1:2) Paul's two letters to Timothy are sometimes referred to as "pastoral epistles," because they contain much in the way of instruction to one who is a servant in the church.

In I Timothy 1:3,4, Timothy is exhorted to "charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith." In chapter two, verse twelve, Paul writes, "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man." The first thirteen verses of the third chapter present the qualification for bishops [elders] and deacons.

Chapter four, verse six, states, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained." In verse fourteen we read, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee," and in the sixteenth verse, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

"Rebuke not an elder," Paul writes in chapter five, verse one, and in the seventeenth verse he says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." Additional instructions concerning teachers in the church are found in chapter six, verse five, where Paul warns against "perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself."

In addition to pastoral instructions, a beautiful outline of God's plan of redemption and restoration of mankind is given us by Paul in this epistle, as well as other important truths. I Timothy 2:3-6 read: "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

It should be noted that in this passage Paul speaks of being "saved" first, and then coming to a "knowledge of the truth." Salvation, in the sense that this term is usually employed in the Bible, can

be attained only through belief in Christ, and a knowledge of Christ is essential to believe on him. “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?”—Rom. 10:14

We note another important fact from Paul’s statement that salvation is first necessary in order to come to a knowledge of the Truth. For this to happen, there must be an awakening from the sleep of death. This is necessary that mankind may learn about Christ, for most have died in total ignorance of him, and among those who have claimed to know him, very few have understood his true place in God’s plan.

After Paul speaks of all coming to a knowledge of the Truth, he outlines one of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. It is the fact that the “man Christ Jesus ... gave himself a ransom for all.” This great Truth, he declares, will be testified, or made known, “in due time.” The due time for the world in general to learn the great teaching of the ransom is when they will be saved—that is, awakened from death—during the thousand years of Christ’s reign.—Rev. 20:4; I Cor. 15:25,26

Second Timothy

Timothy was held in high esteem by the Apostle Paul, and in this second letter, even as in the first, he addresses him as his son. To this “dearly beloved son” his opening salutation is, “Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.”—II Tim. 1:2,3

Much in the second letter, even as in the first, pertains to the ministry of the Truth. In verses six and seven of the first chapter Paul wrote, "I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

"Hold fast the form of sound words," Paul admonishes. (vs. 13) In chapter two, the second verse, we read, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

Then, in verses fourteen to sixteen of this same chapter, the apostle states the following: "Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness."

Paul later gives these wholesome instructions to teachers in the church: "Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."—II Tim. 2:23-25

Paul emphasized to Timothy that the Word of God should always be the basis of instruction, that

he need not go outside of the Scriptures to find needed Truth. He wrote, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."—II Tim. 3:16,17, *Revised Version*

In the last chapter of II Timothy, Paul says with respect to teaching: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."—II Tim. 4:2-5

Paul wrote this epistle during his imprisonment at Rome, after he had been condemned to die. Much in the epistle reflects this background. His final pastoral instruction to Timothy, quoted above, may have been prompted in part, at least, by the imminence of his own death. In it he endeavors to cover every essential point. "Preach ... be instant ... reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine; ... watch thou in all things, ... do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

Immediately after these all-embracing instructions, Paul writes: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up

for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”—I Tim. 4:6-8

Realizing that he would no longer be able to serve, Paul was concerned that Timothy be fully instructed to continue in the same faithful course he had begun. It is well to note that Paul did not expect to go immediately to heaven when he was put to death. He said, instead, “There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,” a crown that he expected to receive, not when he died, but at “that day;” that is, the day of Christ’s appearing, when all the church would be rewarded.

Throughout the course of his faithful ministry Paul endured much weariness, ignominy, and suffering. Now he had reached the end of the way, and he was confident that the Lord would continue to give him strength for whatever might come. He had no regrets. He knew that the final outcome would be glorious, “It is a faithful saying,” he wrote, “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”—II Tim. 2:11,12

Paul looked forward to the privilege of reigning with Christ during the thousand years of his kingdom. He recognized that true Christianity implied more than to suffer and to die. He knew that in God’s due time righteousness would triumph, and that joy and life would be made available for all mankind.—Ps. 30:5; Rev. 21:3-5 ■