

Handout: 2 Thessalonians

Summary Outline of St. Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians

Biblical Period	#12 The Kingdom of the Church			
Covenant	The New Covenant in Christ Jesus			
Focus	Greeting and Warnings Against Deceptions and Evil Influences		Concluding Exhortations and Farewell	
Scripture	1:1-----2:1-----3:1-----3:17-----3:18			
Division	Paul's greeting, thanksgiving, and prayer	The apostasy, the man of sin, and the Parousia	Right conduct within the community	Final greetings and conclusion
Topic	Fearful and disturbed believers		Disobedient and disorderly believers	
	Glory for the just and punishment for the disobedient		Instruction on correct behavior	
Location	Probably from Corinth			
Time	circa 50/51 AD			
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The four-part division of the letter:

1. Greeting, thanksgiving, and prayer for the community (1:1-12)
2. The apostasy, the man of sin, and the Parousia (2:1-17)
3. Right conduct within the community (3:1-16)
4. Final greetings/conclusion (3:17-18)

Paul's greeting in his second letter to the Thessalonians is much like his greeting in the first letter where Silvanus and Timothy are also co-senders, but there are some differences in the second letter and a significant difference from the greetings in Romans and Corinthians:

1. Paul describes God as "our Father" instead of "the Father," reinforcing the unique covenant family relationship with God rather than the creative dimension of God the Father as humanity's Creator.
2. The phrase "the Lord Jesus Christ" is added in the second letter a second time to specify the source of grace and peace.
3. Paul does not claim apostolic authority as he does in most of his other letters.

Paul gives two reasons in 1:8 for those who will face divine judgment on the Day of the Lord:

1. God's judgment will come upon those who do not acknowledge God.
 2. God's judgment will come upon those who are disobedient to the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ.
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In 2:2-12, Paul gives the countdown to the Parousia in the events that must come before Christ's return and presents information concerning the "lawless one" (in the literal Greek text, "the man of sin" and "the son of perdition"). "Son of perdition" is a term that only appears in 2 Thess 2:3 and in Jn 17:12 where Jesus refers to Judas Iscariot as "the son of perdition." In Christian theology, the word "perdition" refers to a state of eternal punishment and damnation into which a sinful and unrepentant person passes after death. St. John calls individual Paul identifies as the "son of perdition"/ "man of sin" the Antichrist in 1 Jn 2:18, 22; 4:3 and 2 Jn 7.

Paul describes the individual who will appear at the end of time to stand in opposition to God and His divine plan for humanity in 2 Thess 2:4-12:

1. The lawless one desires to be revered and to receive the worship of humanity above the True God (verse 4).
2. At present, God restrains his appearance on the stage of human history until the appointed time when he will be revealed (verse 6).
3. The apostasy/rebellion of the lawless one is already at work (verse 7).
4. Satan is the origin of his power (verse 9).
5. God will reveal the lawless one, and Jesus will destroy him when He returns (verse 8).
6. The lawless one will deceive many (verse 11).
7. Those who believe the lawless one above God will be doomed to God's divine judgment and condemnation (verse 12).

*6 And now you know what is restraining [katecheo], that he may be revealed in his time.
7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. But the one who restrains [katecheo] is to do so only for the present, until he is removed from the scene.*

The Greek verb *katecheo* means "to hinder," "restrain," "hold back," or "retain." It appears three times in 1 and 2 Thessalonians and fourteen times in other letters of the New Testament (i.e., Rom 1:18; 1 Thess 5:21; 2 Thess 2:6, 7; Philem 13; Heb 3:6, 14; 10:23). It is somewhat confusing in 2:6 that Paul writes of a mysterious "power" (neuter) that holds back the man of lawlessness and delays his appearance in the world. Then in 2:7, he writes about a person (masculine) who performs the function of "holding back" the lawless one's power until he withdraws and allows the lawless one to make his terrifying debut upon the stage of human history. Both ancient and modern Biblical scholars have debated the identities of the force and the person in verses 6 and 7:

1. The restraining power is the law of the Roman Empire that protected Paul and other Christians until God allowed Nero to become Emperor and with his rule the beginning of Christian persecution.
2. The Holy Spirit is the restraining power and God the Father removes the restraint. The problem is that the New Testament writers never refer to God the Holy Spirit in the neuter even though the word "spirit" in Greek is neuter. They refer to the Holy Spirit as "He."
3. The power is the mission of the Church in spreading the Gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth. Until that mission is complete, the Most Holy Trinity will restrain the power of Satan.
4. The restraining power is the grace of God, but the day will come when He will no longer extend His grace to restrain the forces of evil in humanity's final test.

According to Sacred Scripture and the Catholic Church, the Antichrist is not merely symbolic or an embodiment of an anti-Christian philosophy. The Antichrist is a real person in an alliance with Satan who will reveal himself just before the return of the Christ (see CCC 675-77). The Church teaches that anyone is an antichrist who knowingly perverts the truth about Christ. Culpability includes:

1. Refusing to accept the divine origin of Jesus Christ's being (1 Jn 2:22).
2. Refusing to accept the fact of His coming efleshed as a human man (2 Jn7).

The Church teaches that the Antichrist will present himself as the solution to humanity's problems that can only come "at the price of apostasy from the truth" (CCC 675). He will embody "the supreme religious deception ... a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and his Messiah come in the flesh" (CCC 675).

2:15 Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours.

The Church affirms that the Gospel was handed on in two ways according to the Lord's command: orally and in writing.

1. "orally by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received: whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 76a).
2. "in writing 'by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing'" (CCC 76b).

The Church teaches: "This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, 'the Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.' 'The sayings of the holy Fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition, showing how its riches are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and her prayer'" (CCC 78). Also see 1 Cor 11:20; 2 Thess 2:15 and 2 Thess 3:6.

In 3:13-15, Paul asks the community to avoid those members who are disrupting the church with their bad behavior. This disciplinary effort is necessary because:

1. It will deter others from the bad example of idleness and dependence.
2. It will hopefully encourage repentance from the offenders and restore them to full fellowship in the community.