

There I was sitting in my frigid house with a bit of a hangover, wrapped in a blanket. It was January, I'd been out all night. I was musing about the month being named after Janus, the two-faced Roman god. It was said that Janus could see the past and the future at the same time. That'd be awesome, because if I could see the future, I would soon be rich enough to buy all the liquor and women I could want!

The Apostle Paul had been staying at my house, I wasn't the best host, being out all night. He had almost convinced me that my Roman gods were not real. I was on the verge of becoming a Christian, but let's just say I wasn't quite ready to give up my wild lifestyle.

All of a sudden, reverie interrupted. A group of totally out of control dudes burst through my door. Rough dudes. Rougher than me. What could I do but sit there quietly as they ransacked my house looking for Paul and Silas. Finally, I got their attention. "Paul and Silas aren't here," I shouted. They were out, somewhere. So, they grabbed me instead. They dragged me toward the city officials. And I wasn't the only one either, they were also dragging a few people I recognized who had become believers in Jesus.

At the town center, the officials were in a turmoil. A few Jews and the rough dudes - accused me of hosting someone who opposed the Roman government, someone who followed a king other than Caesar. This was an extremely serious charge. The officials had me post bond and let me go.¹ That was a close one.

Paul and Silas left town and went to Berea that night. Over the next few months, I became a devout believer. How devout? The only other time you see my name in the New Testament, Paul mentions me as his companion at the end of his letter to the Romans written about five years later.²

I one of the first Europeans to become a believer in Jesus, I grew up in Thessalonica. I really struggled with giving up a lifestyle of wine, women, and song. Like so many of my fellow Christian men. Well, I could easily give up the song, but the wine and women part was very challenging. I really enjoyed them.

¹ Acts 17:5-9

² Romans 16:21

I guess what I really wanted was to follow Jesus, but keep my lifestyle. Sound familiar? Paul warned us against trying to do such a thing in his first letter to our little church. Maybe that led to him writing a second letter to us a few months later. Let me tell you about that letter you know as *Second Thessalonians*.

The letter is written from Paul, Silas, and Timothy...but we all know that Paul wrote the letter, as he confirms at the end of the letter. However, we love Silas and Timothy and are convinced that they approve of everything written in the letter.

They encourage us by telling us that they use us as an example of faith and righteousness even in the face of persecution and affliction. We need that encouragement, because some of us are a little discouraged that though we have given up our old ways of life, we still aren't doing enough. We not only need to give up our negative behavior, but we need to institute more positive stuff.

Paul also encourages us to continue to be a good example so that Jesus will be glorified through us. He never tires of telling us that the important thing is for Jesus to be glorified through everything we do and say.

Concerning the coming of Jesus, Paul tells us not to be alarmed by false teachings that were purportedly coming from them, whether these teachings were by prophecy, oral teachings, or by letter.

It would be easy for you to miss the importance of this one sentence. You already know how some of the Jews had falsely taught that Christians had to follow the laws of Moses. That false teaching had been refuted by the apostles and church leaders. Now, other false teachers are beginning to teach differently than Paul on all sorts of matters.

This is the first salvo of accusations in a long-lasting war over what is true and what is false. Paul insists that what he teaches is correct, and any teachings in opposition to his are false. This war is still being fought in your world. Today. However, you have the New Testament to use as a measuring stick of what is right and wrong...we have to rely on the Holy Spirit and our own discernment. As you can imagine, as new believers, we are easily misled by false teachers.

By his description of the coming punishment for our enemies, we are to understand that the day of the Lord has not yet arrived. We are assured that we have not missed that important event. One of the punishments in store for those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus is that they will suffer eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord. We cannot think of anything more horrifying.

Paul continues by writing about something that is quite mysterious to you. He writes about the rebellion and the man of lawlessness. He describes this man as someone who opposes everything godly, and even proclaims himself to be God. Paul describes how this man will be killed directly by Jesus when he returns. This all sounds so cryptic to you, but it is fairly clear to

us because we remember all that Paul had taught us about that subject while he was with us before.

In any event, we learn that anyone who opposes God and refuses to love the truth will perish instead of being saved. Worse, because of their attitude, God will even send them the ability to delude themselves further so that they are unable to believe the truth but will take pleasure in unrighteousness.

We look at our friends and relatives and see that many people around us refuse to hear the gospel and believe. Many of those who refuse to believe the gospel punish us for doing so. That is why Paul continually encourages us to stand firm and take our comfort from God, not from earthly pleasures.

Paul isn't voicing empty words. He reminds us to pray for him because he is often in danger from corrupt people who oppose him and his teachings. We know that to be true, because we know how often he has been beaten and hurt by his enemies. In fact, the first time we met him was when he escaped from his persecutors in Philippi on his second missionary journey.

Maybe you're thinking that we Thessalonians must be preoccupied with the second return of Jesus. If so, you're correct. We *are* focused on that event because of all the good things that it portends for us. Not only will we get to be with Jesus, but we will rule over others instead of being persecuted by them. We cannot wait for Jesus to come back. We perceive that all Christians will be like us until Jesus returns. You're completely focused on his return, right?

Well, one problem with that focus is that many of us concluded Jesus is coming back so soon that we can quit working. As you can imagine, this quickly becomes a problem as more and more Christians need to be fed, while fewer and fewer Christians work to meet the needs of our church.

Paul tries to put a stop to that thought process immediately. He is so bold as to bluntly command that anyone who does not work should not eat. He knows that idleness breeds discontent, it is a bad example for the city to see. He reminds us how he personally worked to pay for himself so we would not be burdened with his care. He commands us to work quietly, earn our own living, and earn the respect of outsiders.

At the same time, Paul also encourages us to continue doing good deeds. Somehow, we have to help people, but not enable them to cross a line. I suspect Christians will always have trouble walking that line.

Paul ends his letter to using his own handwriting. He says His last handwritten line is a sign that the letter is genuine because it is the way he writes all his letters. From this you can infer two

things. First, he typically dictates his letters to a scribe. Second, his handwriting is very distinct since he writes each word in very large letters.³ Probably due his bad eyesight.

When you think of my church at Thessalonica, think of a rather typical early Greek church. We accept the gospel message because it is truthful, and we are tired of the old, useless mythical Greek gods. We are not perfect little angels, but we repent of our old ways, our wild lifestyles for some of us, and try to live as Paul instructs us.

We look forward to the return of Jesus, and our way of life reflects it. Unfortunately, that way of life means that some of us choose not to work. We're just ordinary Christians, maybe a bit like yourselves. That is all Paul wants from us. And from you. Be faithful, be firm in our beliefs, and trust Jesus.

³ Galatians 6:11