

Dear Friends,

As of the January 1 Gleanings, I begin my fortieth year of writing these weekly studies. Many of them grew into books or booklets that were published separately. I am both humbled and sincerely thankful to you who read these studies, and especially to those who encourage the work. At the time I started writing Gospel Gleanings, I had a young family, making it difficult to travel. Gleanings was a way of trying to minister to believers whom I could not see face to face. As I begin the fortieth year of the work, I find myself in the "Senior citizen" season of life. Beginning to end, my prayer is for the Lord to bless these writings far beyond the words I write, to stir your mind with good thoughts, especially good thoughts that encourage you to study your Bible more and more.

Also, the first Sunday in February, I will begin my sixty-eighth year of preaching. When I started at a young age, the dear people who knew and heard me often referred to me as "Little Joe." I have long since grown beyond "Little." As I ponder my present ministry, I find myself spending more time with my Bible (KJV start to finish) and less time with other writings. I often nudge my readers to spend more time "Studying" their Bibles, not speed reading it. If I teach you to study your Bible, I need to practice what I teach you to do. Increasingly with the years and experiences of life and ministry, I find that this precious Book has the answers I need, the right answers from the Lord. I can find more answers and wise instruction there than any other source.

What can we learn from 2 Thessalonians? Try to put yourself in the "Shoes" of the Thessalonians for a moment. You grew up in a pagan culture and lived it till you heard the gospel and came to understand that Jesus knew, loved, and changed you long before you knew about Him. When you heard the good news of "Jesus and the resurrection," (Acts 17:18 KJV) you rejoiced at the message that His resurrection assured your resurrection with Him to eternal glory with Him. All seemed good at that moment. However, with time, persecution from both your former pagan life and from confused believers in Jesus became intense and painful. Will it ever end? Along the way, someone who claimed to be a believer suggested that the resurrection had already occurred. (2 Timothy 2:18 KJV) If the Lord has already returned and raised the dead, why were you not included? Did He forget you? Your faith is flooded with more disappointment and questions than answers. What now? I can hardly imagine a worse state of mind! In both Thessalonian letters, Paul addresses this errant idea and reassures the Thessalonians that the Second Coming has not already occurred. Nor shall it occur until yet more trials and persecutions unfold. (Revelation 6:11 KJV) Even after Paul's personal exhortation, "*Wherefore comfort one another with these words,*" they yet struggled. Therefore, Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians with more emphasis on the Second Coming and the reminder of yet unfulfilled events that shall occur prior to that Day. 2 Thessalonians could well be entitled, "Comfort one another," with greater urgency and comfort than Paul wrote in the first letter.

Lord help us to find that same comfort and joy as we ponder that glorious day!

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

2 Thessalonians

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, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except 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. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 KJV 1900)

Despite Paul's simple explanation of the Second Coming in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, it appears that the Thessalonians continued to stumble at this truth. Experience teaches that, when people struggle with obvious spiritual truth, they are listening either to their own imagination or to false teachers more than to Biblical truth. There is a philosophical term that refers to the source to

which a person looks for what he thinks or believes, “Epistemology.” Oxford Shorter English Dictionary defines this word as relating to the “...grounds, and validity of knowledge.” Where do you look for what you regard as “Facts,” as “Knowledge”? In large part, your choice of “Epistemology” will shape your whole worldview. If you wisely choose your source, your worldview will be balanced and accurate. If you carelessly choose your source, or sources, your worldview will be flawed. In terms of spiritual truth, including everything that relates to God, His existence, His character, His work, and His involvement in our present life, faithful believers should regard Scripture alone as their “Epistemology.” There is a revealing corollary between one’s epistemology and one’s investment of emotional energy. We may claim that we look to Scripture alone, but, if we invest most of our intellectual and emotional energy in anything other than spiritual—Biblical-matters, we reveal that our real epistemology is the idea that claims our emotional energy. This mindset leads to confusion and eventual rejection of Biblical truth.

Paul had many reasons to be thankful for the Thessalonians; he also had reasons to be concerned for their soundness and spiritual stability. They had experienced fierce persecution and continued to struggle to hold onto their faith. Perhaps this trying state explains why they were straining to find relief in the Second Coming, so much so that they allowed the pressures of trial to lead them into errant ideas regarding the Second Coming.

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. “At hand” means that it is

present right now. When John and Jesus said, “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand,*” they taught that it was present at that moment. When John wrote in Revelation 1:3, “...*for the time is at hand,*” he taught a basic truth of the Book of Revelation that most contemporary Christians contradict. If the things of which John wrote were “At hand” at the time of his writing, he did not intend to teach that all the things he would write in Revelation dealt with distant future events. If we adopt a view of Revelation that does not locate its teachings as true and beneficial in the first century for those seven churches to whom John wrote the letter, we have the wrong view. He wrote to seven literal churches. Nothing in the context of Revelation 2-3 or in the literary genre of Revelation suggests an allegorical interpretation of those churches. They were real churches, not allegorical symbols of long segments of time. If our view of Revelation fails to provide immediate comfort and instruction to first century—and twenty-first century—believers, we have the wrong view.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul wrote of the “*Day of the Lord*” and its coming as “*a thief in the night.*” It would occur suddenly and unexpectedly. Apparently, the Thessalonians confused the certainty and the suddenness of the Second Coming event with the idea of immediacy.

...*by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him.* Paul’s framing of the Second Coming in our study passage contrasts the truth of the Second Coming with the errant distortion of it which the Thessalonians believed. When He comes, we shall experience a glorious “*gathering together unto him.*” There can be no possible “Left behind” or “Left out” when He

returns. The prevailing event of His return shall be “***our gathering together unto him.***” The fear of the Thessalonians that they had been left out is not possible on that Day.

...that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. To combat and correct the Thessalonians’ idea that the Second Coming had occurred, and they were missed, Paul offers specific details regarding the events leading up to that day. Instead of the populist idea that this world shall get better and better, Paul cautions that it shall grow worse and worse. A “*falling away*” refers to believers, to people who profess to be followers of Jesus. They were His followers, but the growing sin, likely persecution, and spiritual darkness of that day shall so discourage them that they will lose their perspective and fall away from their faithfulness. Further, Paul teaches that the “*man of sin*” shall be revealed. What does Paul teach us about this man of sin?

1. Not only is he called the “*man of sin,*” but Paul also refers to him as the “*son of perdition.*” Often in Scripture, “son of” identifies dominant character, not necessarily biological offspring. The dominant character of this evil being shall be “perdition.” In this verse, the Greek word translated “perdition” refers to destruction. This evil one destroys wherever he gains a foothold. But on this day the Lord shall destroy him!
2. *Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.* In this straightforward description, Paul refutes a common

populist idea regarding the man of sin. Accepted teaching is that a new or transformed being shall come to exist in the last day and fulfill this prophecy. Paul simply emphasizes that ***this evil one existed and was quite busy at the time he wrote this letter***. He used the present tense verbs. He “opposeth,” not he “shall oppose.” He “exalteth” himself above God, not he “shall exalt himself.” He deceitfully works to convince people that he is either God or greater than God. His final strategy shall mirror his first strategy. (Genesis 3:1-5 KJV) In this he also fulfills Jesus’ description of him as a perpetual liar. When he opens his mouth and speaks, rest assured he lies. Whatever he says, do not believe him; whatever he claims or says is a lie.

3. *...he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. **He goes to church!*** More than any other place on earth, he thrills at disrupting a church. If you observe someone in church saying or doing things that weaken harmony and fellowship, pray for the Lord to deliver them. Their conduct manifests that they are under the man of sin’s influence.

All the verbs in Paul’s description of the man of sin are present tense verbs, not future tense. The man of sin existed in the first century and actively worked his destructive influence whenever he could. Go to Paul’s specific language regarding this evil being and the last day. Paul does not teach that the man of sin shall come to exist and begin his pernicious work. He has existed at least since the Garden of Eden. At that glorious Day, he shall “**be revealed.**” He can no longer lurk in the shadows and

deceive believers to serve his destructive ways. Then the Lord shall shine the bright light of divine judgment upon Him, he shall be revealed and for ever confined to his domain, the lake of fire.

Paul follows the pattern we find throughout Scripture. Whenever Scripture teaches us about the Second Coming, it also teaches us to be faithful and steadfast in our faith till that day dawns. What should we do in the meantime, while we wait and long for that day? Believe the evil one's deceit, think we've been forgotten, and resign our faith? No! Be faithful. Paul devotes much of 2 Thessalonians to these exhortations.

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. (2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 KJV 1900)

After a frightening description of all the potential destruction the man of sin shall do, we celebrate Paul's moving to the next point with "But." Instead of being caught up in all the destruction the man of sin shall cause, Paul thanks the Lord that the Thessalonians have a better future to sustain them in their trials, despite their confusion regarding the Second Coming.

Many believers interpret these verses to teach that new birth and eternal salvation are contingent on one's belief of the gospel. I do not. ***The passage says too much for that view.*** Without question, the Thessalonians were ***already born again.*** Whatever Paul had in mind with these verses was ***yet future.*** They were chosen to, called to, the blessings named. Further, the new birth brings us to eternal life in Jesus. Whatever Paul intended in these verses would lead the Thessalonians ***“to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ,”*** His glory, not His life.

Consider another passage that might help us understand this lesson.

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:20 KJV 1900)

Those who have the ability to glorify God in their body and spirit are already *“bought with a price,”* already saved or born again. Likewise, I believe Paul intended to encourage the Thessalonians that, despite their confusion regarding the Second Coming, no small error in faith, they were the Lord's own beloved children, and they yet had the ability by the Lord's loving grace to live in His glory.

Louw-Nida define the Greek word translated “obtain” in 2 Thessalonians 2:14 as “the experience of an event or state which has been acquired.” If we apply this definition to the verse, Paul is assuring the Thessalonians that they already possess this glory in potential. If they abandon their errant ideas regarding the Second Coming and live their daily lives in the faith of Jesus, they shall

“Experience” the blessed joy of the glory of Christ right now in the gospel of God’s good news to His people (A glory already acquired for them by Jesus). What has the Lord appointed for His chosen people in the gospel, specifically in their belief of it and living in its teachings? A “salvation” that grows in them the experience of a “glory” previously acquired for them by the work of Jesus. When believers live their steadfast Biblical faith “Faithfully,” rather than regard their faith as a pleasant Sunday morning hobby, they slowly grow into the experience of the glory of Jesus day by day. To the Thessalonians, Paul’s teaching is pointed. Stop focusing on persecution, trials, and life’s difficulties. Stop chasing windmills of distraction from your faith in Jesus. Start looking to Jesus and walking in fellowship with Him. Experience that wondrous glory right now instead of your depressing idea that you’ve been missed or left out of the very event for which the Lord chose you and to which He shall effectually bring you at His coming.

Elder Joe Holder