

NT Reading Plan 2020

Living Hope Fellowship
1 & 2 Thessalonians

Second Coming

Eschatology (last things) including the second coming of Christ is a dominant theme in both Thessalonian epistles. Right away, I'm asking you not to have preconceived notions of what that looks like as you read these letters. I want you to see *why* Paul uses the doctrines of final things with this church much more than *when* these events happen (which is the focus of too many studies). As with all doctrine, eschatology is immensely practical. We can't miss the applications that Paul is drawing for this church who rightfully longs for the return of her Lord!

I am indebted to Dr. Michael Canham, one of my professors, for pointing out how Paul corrected false teaching/living (those always go together!) in two ways: If Paul was dealing with legalism (insisting on adding something to the gospel such as circumcision in order to be saved), he pointed people back to the **first coming of Christ** where Jesus' finished work of substitutionary death and resurrection was sufficient. Nothing else needed to be added (think Galatians here). On the other hand, if Paul was dealing with those who overstressed grace to the point of dismissing God's laws (because, hey, it's all of grace so we can do whatever we want), he pointed to the **second coming of Christ**. As we will explore in the notes below, the Thessalonians needed reminders not just of the reality of Christ's second coming but of the applications we must all make in light of that.

1. Go through 1 Thessalonians and look for anything that directly speaks of Jesus' first coming, things like his earthly life, the cross, his resurrection. Underline those. Now underline that which talks about Christ's second coming (different colors help). How much time does he spend on Christ's first coming versus his future coming?

Affliction

The first major theme we need to see in relation to the second coming is that Paul pastorally comforts Christians who are undergoing persecution and affliction (1Th 1:6; 2:1, 2, 14-16; 3:3-5, 7; 2Th 1:4, 5; 3:2). When Paul ministered the gospel in Thessalonica, a riot broke out. A new believer had to post bond to go home that day. The evangelists had to escape or hide so the mob "could not find them" (Acts 17:6).

This church needed to know that Jesus "delivers us from the wrath to come" (1Th 1:10). They needed to know that those who died in the church, possibly from persecution, would be raised up and reunited with the church (1Th 4:13-18). They needed to be reminded that Christ's second coming would result in God afflicting those who afflict them right now with a just and severe punishment (2Th 1:5-12).

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10 again. Why does Paul long to see this church? Why was Timothy sent to them? What did Paul fear the afflictions they suffered may have resulted in?

Sanctification

Paul's comforted that the Thessalonians are standing fast in faith despite the present challenges but they still needed to grow in the Lord. Christ is coming, pursue sanctification more and more. Present challenges were opportunities to seek holiness in light of Christ's

coming return (See 1Th 3:11-13). Holiness is directly related to the word sanctification in the Greek, being set apart unto God and away from the world. This theme is developed in these verses: 1Th 2:10-12 (examples of holy living and exhortations to follow their lead); 3:13; 4:1-8; 5:5-8, 12-24; 2Th 2:13. In each of those sections, you find statements about the second coming of Christ. Jesus' return is always meant to cause us to live more and more godly lives in the present. Jesus is coming back, therefore you cannot just live any way you please. The second coming is an incentive to holiness!

3. 1Th 3:12-13 says that the Lord Jesus will establish our hearts blameless in holiness. 1 Th 5:23-24 tells us that God the Father will surely sanctify us (that is progressively make us more and more like Jesus). 2Th 2:13 tells us that the Holy Spirit has already sanctified us (changed our position from one in the world to one in God's kingdom). Both of these aspects of sanctification are the work of the triune God! What role do we play in our sanctification (see 1Th 4:3-8; 5:5-8)?

Encouragement

Paul brought up issues related to the second coming in order to encourage the church and have the church encourage one another with these things (see 1Th 4:18; 5:11).

4. How can we take Paul's cue when it comes to discussions regarding end times with believers who do not agree with us? No matter how we understand things (and we're all wrong on something!), what should we do for one another when talking about Christ's return?

Already Taught

If you read Acts 17 (please do!), you'll see that Paul taught the Thessalonians over 3 weeks. From the OT Scriptures, he proved to them that "it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead" (first coming). We know from his letters to that church that he must have also spent a good deal of time teaching those who believed the gospel about Christ's second coming. As Paul writes both epistles, he is reminding them of what he already taught them (that must have been a packed 3 weeks of church planting!). See 1Th 2:4; 4:2, 9; 5:1-2; 2Th 2:5; 3:6. After looking over those verses, compare 1Th 4:13.

5. The Bible often goes over old ground, over things we already know and have been taught. What are you presently doing to continually remind yourself of what you already know and continuing to learn so that you are not uniformed (1 Th 4:13)?

Examples to Imitate

Finally, I want to point out that these letters show genuine gospel ministers walking in holiness as examples for the church to imitate. Gospel work is WORK, it's toil and can be very consuming. Not only is your body in it (sometimes being persecuted at that), and your mind active in teaching, so is your heart in affection for the people (see the rich picture of mother and father imagery in 1Th 2:7-12).

The Thessalonians seemed to have an acute problem with their work ethic. False teaching regarding the second coming only seemed to exacerbate this (see 2Th 2:1-5). Where they knew the truth that Paul previously taught them, they misapplied the Scriptures. Many seemed to be loitering around just waiting on Christ to come. They weren't working. They were idle. Why work if everything's going to be burned up in the end, right? Anyone who went through the Camp Fire with me knows the tension of putting money and labor and toil into

something that may not last very long! The Thessalonians were not making the right applications. Christ is coming back therefore get to work! We've got a job to do here people and we better be urgent about it. Besides, you can't move back into your parent's basement and wait out the storm.

The ministers who labored to bring the gospel to Thessalonica also taught the people about the second coming. Work and the second coming are compatible! Therefore, Paul gives the church lots of opportunity to meditate on the examples he and his fellow evangelists were as a call to imitate his way of life. These exhortations can be summed up in 1Th 2:12; 4:1, 12.

6. Now that you know the Thessalonian's bent toward idleness, what is it about the second coming of Christ that compels one to work rather than sit around?