

2 Thessalonians

Bible Study

Patiently Waiting

2 Thessalonians 3:4—6

When the Thessalonians lost their hope (as seen in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 but missing in 2 Thessalonians 1:3) because they accepted wrong doctrine, their faith and love were also in danger. According to Colossians 1:4—5, faith and love are tied closely with hope. A literal translation reads that Paul heard of their faith and love through the hope being reserved for you in the heavens. These Thessalonians, having lost their hope, would soon see their faith and love crumbling. This is why Paul quickly moved to correct their wrong thinking. The longer their future hope of the Rapture was put into question, the more likely they would fail in other areas of their spiritual life. Notice that they were not shaken because they believed a falsehood. The Tribulation and Second Coming will be absolute realities for the Kingdom saints. They were shaken because they were pulled away from the truth concerning the Body of Christ and our hope of escaping the wrath which is to come, the Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9). Satan always seems to mix his lies with God's truth. In this case, everything they were told was biblical, however it was not all dispensationally accurate.

This is also how Satan works today. He takes the truths of Pauline doctrine and mixes in the truths of Peter's doctrine to dilute and confuse believers concerning the rich blessings we, in the Body of Christ, have been given. When Satan introduces doctrine meant exclusively for Israel under God's prophetic program, it distracts Christians from living properly for the Lord. Proper edification can only be achieved when we follow Paul's instructions found only in his 13 books (Romans—Philemon). When we stray from his instructions for the Body of Christ, our spiritual life will be stunted because we spend time doing the wrong things. For instance, instead of resting in our forgiveness and forgiving others as Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32) we worry that we may be condemned for not reaching out to someone in forgiveness (Matthew 6:14—15; 1 John 1:9). Instead of living a life in peace by giving everything to the Lord in prayer (Philippians 1:9), we are concerned that God isn't listening because He is not answering every prayer the way I prayed it (Matthew 21:22). It's a dangerous thing for a believer to try to live according to the wrong doctrine.

Surrounded by love (verse 5)

With the Thessalonian believers troubled and shaken (2 Thessalonians 2:2), Paul is attempting to calm their fears with solid doctrine, giving them an unwavering hope for the future. Back in 2 Thessalonians 1:7, Paul acknowledges that they were troubled, and he is doing everything possible so that they will rest in the knowledge of the truth. There is great comfort in correct doctrine. Knowledge of the Lord will help us to understand His great love for us. Paul was overwhelmed with God's love and desired that we understand it as he understood it (Philippians 1:9). The knowledge of God will lead us to be filled with the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19) which should lead us to serve Him unselfishly (2 Corinthians 5:14). The knowledge of God's great love should be a wonderful comfort to us because it assures us that God only wants His best for our lives. When problems arise or persecution is directed toward us, God, in His love, will handle it for His good, which will ultimately be for our good, because He loves us (Romans 8:28).

Patiently waiting (verse 5)

Paul first writes about knowledge of the love of God and then about waiting patiently for Christ. The Thessalonians had been taught the difference between the Rapture and the Second Coming when Paul wrote his first letter to them (Chapters 4 & 5). Instead of waiting patiently, they panicked when they were told they missed the Rapture. They were to bear up under the persecution and tribulation they were going through while waiting patiently for the Lord to come (Colossians 1:11). Once He comes to take

them home, Paul promised that God would avenge those who had been tormenting the believers in Thessalonica (2 Thessalonians 1:4—8). Their ultimate hope was in being Raptured and in knowing God would personally pour out retribution on their tormentors.

We, too, are to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord. It's so easy to be brought down by the cares of this world and become tangled up in every-day living. But that's not the life Paul had in mind for us. To patiently wait means to be steadfast, to not lose sight of the end goal, to keep your focus heavenward, all in spite of trials or hardships. As Paul says in Romans 5:3, tribulation works to give us patience. The trials we experience can work to shake and upset our hope and faith, as we saw happen with the Thessalonians, or it can strengthen us as we faithfully keep our focus on God, so that we will come out the other side in victory.

Since hope was lacking in the lives of the Thessalonians, Paul was working at restoring it so they could confidently move forward in spiritual growth and edification. Hope springs out of the word of God as we patiently endure (Romans 8:2—5). The best source of strength, in times of need, comes from filling our minds with the encouragement found in God's Word. There is power in Scripture because the Holy Spirit dwells in each believer, turning these "ordinary" words in to a powerful, life-changing instrument that can work to bring us to spiritual maturity (Romans 15:13; 16:25; Ephesians 6:10).

Bad doctrine (verse 6)

Our Christian life should be characterized as a life that is connected to Christ through the Holy Spirit, and at the same time, disconnected from the world. Paul has been instructing (re instructing) the Thessalonians to go back to the doctrine that they were taught when he first visited. Now, in verse 6 he says that they were to withdraw from those who were not walking after the tradition (teaching) that they received from Paul. When they listened to doctrine that ran contrary to what Paul had been teaching, they became as ships that had run aground. Their Christian walk and life were shaken to the core, requiring Paul to do damage control to get them back on track.

There is much we can learn from these letters to the Thessalonians. One of the most valuable lessons is in seeing what happens when a believer leaves the Mystery doctrine, as preached by Paul, and follows something else. As we read through the book of Galatians, we see how the Galatians foolishly left Paul and went back into Judaism, putting themselves under the Mosaic Law (Galatians 1:6). Although the Law was given to Israel by God, and therefore was (and is) perfect as it stands, believers in this dispensation of Grace are wrong to do what the Galatians did. They left Paul (Dispensation of Grace) to follow Peter (Dispensation of Law). Both doctrines are biblical and both are good, however, only one doctrine is proper to follow in this dispensation. Most churches today teach a hybrid theology, combining a little of Paul with a lot of Peter. This is absolutely detrimental to the Christian faith, and is exactly why Paul had warned the church to follow his doctrine exclusively (Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 1:16). Paul is our master builder (1 Corinthians 3:10) and his doctrine, given to him by the risen and glorified Jesus Christ, is the only doctrine we should follow. Churches that disobey Paul's direct command are actually doing Satan's work of confusing God's people and stunting their spiritual growth. Although we do need to come together in love, we also need to be careful to make sure we are like minded in doctrine. We cannot jettison doctrine in the name of love. A true love among the brethren can only be exhibited when we come together, unified by correct doctrine.

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