

OVERVIEW & OUTLINE

2 Thessalonians

The evangel according to Paul

“To make known the secret of the evangel” (6:20)

BOB EVELY

2012.

“Yet faithful is the Lord, Who will be establishing you
and guarding you from the wicked one.”
2 Thessalonians 3:3

*All Scriptures taken from the Concordant Literal New Testament
and the Concordant Version of the Old Testament unless otherwise noted.
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About the Author

Paul begins by identifying himself as the writer of this letter (1:1) Let us recall the commission Paul received on the road to Damascus: *He is a choice instrument of Mine, to bear My name before both the nations and kings, besides the sons of Israel.* (Acts 9:15-16) And we know from Acts that Paul did go first to the synagogues to proclaim Christ to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. Peter, John, James and other New Testament writers had a commission to Israel only. Paul alone was commissioned to go to the Gentiles.

We cannot assume Paul's message to the Gentiles was the same as the message proclaimed by the others unto Israel. Paul stressed that the gospel he proclaimed was not received from man, *but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.* (Galatians 1:11-12) If he preached the same gospel, why would he not have studied under the Twelve who had heard and observed Christ Himself during His earthly ministry? And why would Paul refer to his proclamation as "my evangel" instead of "the evangel?" (Romans 2:16; 16:25-26). Paul notes that he had been entrusted with the evangel of the Uncircumcision, and Peter had been trusted with the evangel of the Circumcision. (Galatians 2:7). He did not say that his was the evangel to the Uncircumcision; but of the Uncircumcision. It was a different message, and this can be clearly seen if we examine the details. Paul is the only one to have mentioned the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, or the expectation of the body of Christ in the celestials in Ephesians 2:6. Israels' expectation was always upon the earth, not in the celestials or heavens.

Paul was abandoned by nearly all at the end of his ministry (see 2 Timothy 1:15; 4:16; Acts 21:20). Note in the Acts passage that when Paul returned to Jerusalem he was opposed not by unbelieving Jews, but by believing Jews who were zealous for the law – a clear signal that Paul's message was different than that of the Twelve, and as a result Paul was opposed by Jewish *believers*.

Paul, in his writings, refers to a mystery that had been previously concealed, but which he was now revealing as God had instructed him. ... *His body, which is the ecclesia of which I became a dispenser, in accord with the administration of God, which is granted to me for you, **to complete the word of God** ... the **secret** which has been **concealed** from the eons and from the generations, yet now was **made manifest** to His saints ...* (Colossians 1:24-16) ... *by revelation the secret is made known to me ... the secret of the Christ, which, in other generations, is not made known to the sons of humanity ...* (Ephesians 3:3-5)

Clearly Paul was commissioned to address a group not previously addressed by the Twelve (the Gentiles), with a different message that had been revealed to him not by man but by Christ Himself.

THE ADDRESS ON THE ENVELOPE (1:1)

From:
Paul, Silvanus & Timothy

To: The ecclesia
of the Thessalonians

OPENING REMARKS (1:3)

The context. Paul is thankful that their faith is flourishing and their love is increasing, and that they are enduring despite *persecutions and afflictions*.

The unveiling. ... *at the Unveiling of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven* [He will be] *dealing out vengeance to those who are not acquainted with God and those who are not obeying the evangel of our Lord Jesus Christ – who shall incur the justice of eonian extermination ...* (1:8-9) We note the opening words of the last book in the Bible, commonly called Revelation: *The Unveiling of Jesus Christ ...* The words are similar, as Paul here makes reference to the same event.

Eonian extermination means death for an eon or eons to come. It is *eonian* (for an eon, or multiple eons) *extermination* (death) ... not *everlasting destruction* as some translations erroneously report. It is not a final condition, but a step in the process of God's dealings with mankind. [See *eon* in Glossary]

THE DAY OF THE LORD NOT YET HERE (2:1)

Some in their midst were declaring that the Day of the Lord was already present (2:1-3). But Paul warns them not to be deluded. The Day of the Lord is that period of time, following the removal of the body of Christ unto the heavens (1 Thessalonians 4:13ff), when the events immediately preceding and culminating with the return of Christ to the earth will take place. [See *Day of the Lord* in Glossary]

Could this same warning be valid today? Some today are claiming that the Day of the Lord has already come, just as some were saying in Paul's day. Did the Day of the Lord commence since Paul's writing to the Thessalonians? I think not, based on what Paul says next. Let us read on.

Certain things must occur prior to the Day of the Lord. The apostasy must come first (2:3) and the *man of lawlessness* must be unveiled ... the son of destruction who lifts himself up over everyone termed a god, and who is seated in the temple of God, demonstrating that he is God.

Something is detaining the man of lawlessness. Paul notes that while *the secret of lawlessness is already operating (2:7)*, *the man of lawlessness* has not yet been unveiled, and he will be unveiled *in his own era (2:7)*. *Only when the present detainer may be coming to be out of the midst, then will be unveiled the lawless one ... with all power and signs and false miracles ...* seducing those who do not receive the love of the truth, and who God therefore deceives into believing the falsehood. (2:8-12). We read of all of this taking place in the book of *Revelation*, when the Day of the Lord comes.

From this description, and coupled with Paul's mention of the body of Christ's removal from the earth in 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff, it would seem that the *detainer* that Paul mentions here is the body of Christ, or more probably the *holy spirit* that is operating within the body of Christ. Once this is removed from the earth, the man of lawlessness will be unveiled, and the Day of the Lord will commence.

STAND FIRM (2:13)

God calls the body of Christ. *God prefers you from the beginning for salvation, in holiness of the spirit and faith in the truth, into which He also calls us through our evangel ... (2:13-14)* So while the Day of the Lord will one day come upon the earth, God has called a subset of humanity (the body of Christ) to be set apart (i.e. holy; differentiated). [See *holy* in Glossary] God's method of calling these set-apart-ones is through Paul's *evangel*.

Stand firm in Paul's evangel. *Stand firm, and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us. (2:15)* For God is giving us *an eonian consolation and a good expectation in grace ... (2:16-17)* Paul is encouraging those who are facing affliction and persecution to stand firm in their faith, strengthened and consoled by the expectation that is theirs.

Paul asks for prayer for the word of the Lord to *race and be glorified*, and for Paul to be *rescued from abnormal and wicked men ... (3:1-2)*. Paul's frequent use of prayer displays its importance, and the nature of Paul's prayers is always enlightening. Far from self-centered, Paul's concern is always with the glory of God and the success of the evangel.

The Lord will establish you and guard you from the wicked one. (3:3). *Now we have confidence in you in the Lord that what we are charging, you are doing also and will be doing. (3:4). Now may the Lord be directing your hearts into the love of God and into the endurance of Christ. (3:5)* Paul's confidence is not in the Thessalonians ... but *in the Lord*. And Paul does not direct the believers to strive toward love and endurance in their own strength ... he asks the Lord to direct their hearts toward those ends.

ADMONISH THE DISORDERLY (3:6)

Avoid the disorderly. *Be putting yourselves from every brother who is walking disorderly and not in accord with the tradition which they accepted from us. (3:6)*

Imitate us (3:8) ... *for we are not disorderly among you ...*

Work (3:8) ... *neither did we eat bread gratuitously from anyone, but with toil and labor, we are working night and day, so as not to be burdensome to any of you.*

Paul had the right to ask for their support, but he voluntarily forfeited that right and instead became a model to be imitated (3:9).

If anyone is not willing to work, *neither let him eat. (3:10)* Indeed, some were *walking disorderly, working at nothing, but are meddling (3:11)*. Paul charged the brethren to work *with quietness, that they may be eating their own bread (3:12)*. And if any are not obeying the word from Paul through this epistle ...

Don't commingle with him (3:15). And while the disorderly are to be admonished, they are to be **admonished as a brother**; not deemed as an enemy. The one who is not heeding Paul's words has not lost his salvation and is not excommunicated as a "member of the church;" but he is to be cast out of fellowship of the brethren.

Appendix

Key Words & Phrases

Day of the Lord / Coming Indignation

The Day of the Lord is that period of time, following the removal of the Body of Christ unto the heavens (1 Thessalonians 4:13ff), when the events immediately preceding and culminating with the return of Christ to the earth will take place. Consider the sequence of events as revealed in the Scriptures. John the Baptist spoke of fleeing from the impending indignation, calling upon his audience (Israel) to produce fruit worthy of repentance. But when Paul introduced God's revelation for this present era, he announced that God was in Christ conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning mankind's offenses to them. Far from a message warning of impending indignation, Paul announced that God was conciliated to mankind. Our message, as Christ's ambassadors, is simply: *Be conciliated to God*. (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). Most certainly there will come a time when God's indignation will be coming (Romans 2:9), on the *day of indignation* that is set by God (Romans 2:5). But the believer is saved from this coming indignation (Romans 5:9) ... by *our Rescuer out of the coming indignation* (1 Thessalonians 1:10). We within the Body of Christ are saved from the coming indignation not because we are better than others of humanity; but because God has elected to choose a subset of humanity ... giving them the ability to believe and perceive that which He has revealed ... and enabling them to serve as a complement of Christ in this age and in the ages to come; toward the end that God's will for mankind be accomplished; that all mankind be saved and come to a realization of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

Prior to indignation coming upon the earth, Christ will descend from heaven and *snatch away* the body of Christ. This event, described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, is commonly referred to as the rapture. When Paul speaks of a *detainer* that must be removed before the man of lawlessness can be unveiled (2 Thessalonians 2:6-12), it would seem that this detainer is the body of Christ – or more probably the holy spirit that dwells within the body of Christ -- that is indeed removed on the day that Christ descends. Once the detainer is removed, the man of lawlessness is revealed and the day of indignation will arrive, as described in the book of Revelation.

Ecclesia

The Greek *ecclesia* is most always translated *church* in our Bible versions, except in those cases where the notion of *church* does not fit. This inconsistency in translation causes us to lose valuable insights provided by God, and requires that we place great faith in the translators and not in the word of God itself. *Ecclesia* means called-out-ones ... those whom God has

called out of the larger group of humanity for some specific purpose. But just as there are different presidential administrations enforcing different policies in our political realm, so also there are different administrations in God's workings in the world. In his letters, Paul speaks of the specific administration of God that was granted to him, in which the body of Christ is the specific ecclesia, or group of called-out-ones, for which he became a dispenser of good news. The Body of Christ was not introduced by any other person in the Scriptures, either before or after Paul. It was Paul's specific commission. Peter and others within the Twelve addressed the believers among Israel ... that was the called-out-group (ecclesia) they addressed. Paul had a *different* commission, in a *different* administration, and the body of Christ was the called-out-group (*ecclesia*) that he addressed. Whenever you see the word *church* in your translation, remember the underlying Greek *ecclesia* simply means called-out-ones ... and the group of called-out-ones may vary from one passage to another.

Eon / Eonian

This is one of the most misunderstood words in the Bible. The Greek word *aion* and its Hebrew equivalent *olam* clearly do not mean endless or eternal, but refer to fixed periods of time with a beginning and an end. Thus the many variations we see in the Scriptures:

- ✓ Eon (singular)
- ✓ Eons (plural)
- ✓ Before the eons
- ✓ End of the eon (singular)
- ✓ End of the eons (plural)
- ✓ Eon of the eons
- ✓ Eons of the eons
- ✓ The oncoming eons
- ✓ The impending eon
- ✓ This eon
- ✓ The current eon

Most Bible translations treat this word very inconsistently, sometimes using *eternal* and other times *age* when eternal will not fit. But such inconsistent handling of the word causes much of what God has revealed to us to be lost or confused. The adjective form *eonian* refers to something that takes place during one eon, or during several eons.

Well known and respected preacher and author G. Campbell Morgan expressed it best, noting there is no word in the Greek that translates to our English word *eternal* and which means endless. When God is described as an

Eonian God this does not mean He is not, in fact, eternal. It is just that the Bible talks about things as they exist or occur in this time period known as the eons. God is eonian, but He will also continue to exist after the eons are concluded.

Holy

If we examine the word *holy* or *hallowed* in every instance where we find it, we observe its meaning is to be *set apart* or *differentiated*. God is holy (set apart), and He designates certain people or things as holy; not because they have any special merit, but because God has chosen them to be used in some fashion for his purposes. The clothing to be used by the priests in the Old Testament were not necessarily *better* than other clothing, and the animals deemed to be *clean* were not necessarily *better* or more righteous than other animals. But God chose certain clothing and certain animals to be *set apart ... to differentiate* his people from other peoples of the earth. And when one is designated as holy, God defines certain behaviors for that individual that are acceptable, and that differentiate that one from others. So holy does not mean better or more righteous than others. Holy simply means set apart or differentiated from others. In the Old Testament God delivered to Israel (His set apart people) the Law; but Israel found it impossible to keep the Law. As it turns out, the Law was used to show the people their helplessness to be righteous based on their works, and it led them to Christ. In Galatians, Paul would tell the believers that they were freed from the Law. The elements of the Law were no longer requirements for God's people, although Paul continues to encourage the believers to live a life that was worthy of God's grace that had been given to them freely. So in the Old Testament, God's people (Israel) were set apart, and they were expected to follow very detailed set-apart behaviors to be righteous. In the present era, through God's grace the set-apart people (body of Christ) are *holy* regardless of behavior. Certain behavior is described as acceptable and other behavior as unacceptable, but regardless of behavior those within the body of Christ are saved and continue to be God's holy people.

A Word about Bible Translations

Today there are many different Bible translations to choose from. Many of the newer ones have been written for financial gain (to sell Bibles). And those written with the intent to provide an easy-to-read translation incorporate the translators' opinions and theologies into the translation, making them *interpretations* instead of pure translations. Many different Hebrew or Greek words are often translated using a single English word, making it impossible

to recognize distinctions without using laborious study helps. The translators have done this because they have determined there is no practical difference between the various Hebrew and Greek words; but what if they are wrong? Similarly, a single word in the Hebrew or Greek is often translated using different English words with drastically different meanings. Here the translators assume to know that God was using a single word to refer to very different ideas. Could the translators be wrong in their assumptions?

I appreciate the Concordant Version, not because I trust the translators more than other translators, but because of the methodology used. Great care was taken to allow the reader to distinguish between different Greek or Hebrew words. Whenever possible, an English word is only used for a single Greek or Hebrew word, and each Hebrew or Greek word is translated using the same consistent English word or idea. There is a keyword concordance in the back of the New Testament that allows the reader to look at all other instances where the same Greek word was used, thereby checking the translation. This methodology may make the translation more difficult to read, but it also preserves the distinctions made in God's Word in the original languages, and it prevents the bias of the translator from creeping into the translation as much as is humanly possible.

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