

The Second Coming in Thessalonians #5

Probably the most consistent theme of the two books of Thessalonians is the second coming of Christ. So far we have looked at 1 Thess. 1:10, 2:19, 3:12-13, 4:13-18, and 5:1-6.

1 Thess. 5:23 – “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The very God of Peace

Why does Paul refer to God as a “God of peace”, especially after seeing how in the “day of the LORD” (see previous lesson), God will destroy all his enemies in cataclysmic and bloody retribution? It is true that he will destroy his enemies, in ways that are too horrible even to put into words, and yet that destruction will not be inflicted upon us. Though we used to be his enemies, and were under a just but delayed condemnation, yet now we are no longer his enemies, having been redeemed by the blood of Christ.

Eph. 2:12-14 – “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

Col. 1:20-22 – “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel ...”

Rom. 5:8-10 – “... For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

Rom. 5:1 – “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:”

Sanctify you wholly

God has sanctified us, and is sanctifying us. This has been dealt with much previously, but to be sanctified is to be set apart and consecrated to God, being made holy unto him. We are called “saints” (Rom. 1:7).

He sanctifies us wholly – not just in part. He doesn’t just “save our souls”. He saves us spirit and soul and body. This is why many believers refer to the “full gospel”, as being not just forgiveness, but also healing and deliverance.

And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless

Paul also says that God is preserving us, spirit, soul, and body. This is active, even though usually unperceived by us. He can do this by his Holy Spirit leading us, or by intervention of angels. It can even be by the Word – as we read and obey the Bible, God works in us to enable us to avoid temptations and judgments.

Unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

This preservation will be “unto the coming of our Lord Jesus”. How can it be said that he preserves our bodies if we die and our bodies decay? Because God in his omniscience knows and cares even about our physical bodies after death. At death our spirits are kept alive in Paradise with Christ, and our bodies are “kept” in the earth as dust, to be raised at the last day, to be united with our spirits as a new, glorified body (see 1 Cor. 15).

2 Thess. 1:7-10 – “And to you who are troubled [God will recompense] rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from

the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe ...”

Verse 7 – “And to you who are troubled [*God will recompense*] rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.”

This verse is awkward in the KJV, but it is a contrast with verse 6. God recompenses (repays, remunerates, “pays back”) tribulation to those who persecute us, but to us, he gives a state of rest. Even now we can experience this rest, but it will especially be manifested in the future when Christ returns.

When he returns, he will be accompanied by a myriad of angels. Not chubby little baby angels with bows and arrows, but “mighty angels”. Mt. 25:31 – “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:” As we saw in an earlier lesson, Jesus will return at the end of the Tribulation with all his saints, and with his holy angels.

Presently Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, but at his return, he will be reigning as King of all the earth during the Millennium, from Jerusalem.

Verse 8 - In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:”

At this return all chance of repentance is past because he is coming with flaming fire, and will take vengeance on all those who spurned his gospel, who do not know God, and have not obeyed the gospel.

Verse 9 – “Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; “

This punishment will be destruction, and it will be everlasting. There will be no hope of ever escaping their judgment. The concept of purgatory is a very pernicious doctrine, not just because it is nowhere in the Bible, but because it encourages people to think they can suffer punishment “for a while” and then be accepted into God’s favor from then on.

Some, like Jehovah’s Witnesses, do not believe in hell or eternal punishment, and so have invented the concept of soul sleep, followed by utter destruction of the souls of the wicked. That is, the judgment of the wicked is to be destroyed even to the point of non-existence. So, they want to believe in eternal rewards (in heaven), but deny eternal punishment. However, Mt. 25:46 says “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” In the Greek of this verse, the words for “everlasting” and “eternal” are exactly the same, αἰώνιον (pronounce eye-OWE-knee-on). So you cannot hold to eternal rewards for the righteous in heaven, and then claim that the punishment of the wicked in hell is only temporary, or that hell does not exist.

The subjects of his wrath will suffer punishment, and a part of that punishment will be that they will be forever separated from the presence of God. Even now, unredeemed men benefit from the goodness of God. Although we cannot usually see God and experience him sensually, yet he is present with us. In Hades (for now), and in the lake of fire (in the future), the unredeemed will be utterly separated from God’s forbearing goodness. In physical life, even those who will never be redeemed still enjoy the goodness of life. That ceases at death.

They will also be separated from the glory of his power. They will know his power, but it will be the power of destruction. God’s glory is manifested, at least in part, by light. His presence enlightens everything. Yet in hell is described as darkness, perhaps most significantly because it is a state of separation from God and his glory.

Verse 10 – “When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe ...”

When Christ comes, he will be glorified and exalted in all his saints. It is not just that we will be praising him, but that all will see the glorious ways that he showed us his loving kindness and preservation here in this life. We will also see each other in our “glorified bodies” – no longer this corruptible flesh, but the bodies of the resurrection. Everything, even we, will be enlightened by his glory, like Moses’ face.

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Mt. 6:13)