

Encouragement In The Storm

2 Thessalonians must have been an encouraging letter from the apostle Paul to the believers in the city of Thessalonica. They were experiencing such severe persecution that they thought they had missed the rapture and were living in the tribulation. They had concluded they must not be saved (2 Thessalonians 1:4-5). It appears that some individual or individuals were teaching they had missed the rapture (2 Thessalonians 2:2). The believers also had people in the church who were asking for money or food and were not working. So the apostle Paul sought to encourage them by telling them they had not missed the rapture. He gave them signs of the end times so that they could know when the tribulation would start. Finally, he

explained that those who were unwilling to work should not be given food. “No work, then no eat.” We discovered that in our last study which was from chapter three and verses 6-15.

This study is about the last three verses of this wonderful letter (2 Thessalonians 3:16-18). But before we dig into these verses, I want to explain the purpose of these last three verses and why they are important. We often call these last verses the benediction.

If we took the time to read each of Paul’s letters, we would learn that his benediction is often a high-level summary of the letter. For example, Paul’s letter to the Romans is a wonderful but long explanation of the gospel. Then in the benediction of his letter, Paul prayed that God the Father would establish the believers according to the gospel and that they would be

obedient to the faith. Then he praised the “only wise God” through Jesus Christ. His praise was about God’s wisdom of the gospel.

Paul’s letter to the believers in the city of Corinth was a rebuke of one sin after another. We are familiar with 1 Corinthians 13. We call it the chapter on love, and that is true. But it was actually part of an instruction to the Corinthian believers to love each other, because they were not loving each other. So, in Paul’s benediction he urged them to love Christ and told them that he loved them. The point was they needed to love Christ first and each other.

Then in the benediction of his second letter to the Corinthians,

Paul urged them to live in peace and give each other a holy kiss. He did this because they were not living in peace because they were still not loving each other.

His letter to the Galatians was one

long rebuke because they were starting to believe false doctrine about salvation. The letter is sad because he had to refute the false doctrine of the Judaizers and defend himself against the false teachers who were attacking Paul. This helps us understand why the benediction of this letter says,

From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen. Galatians 6:18-19 (NASB)



Most of the benedictions of Paul's letters have one common theme. Paul expresses his desire that God's grace would be upon them.

INTRODUCTION. In the benediction of 2 Thessalonians, we are going to discover that it should have been comforting and encouraging to the believers in the church in Thessalonica too! Why? Because Paul explained that God is the source of peace and grace. This is a great study because it is about peace and grace—two concepts that we often miss when we read Scripture.

LORD GIVES US PEACE (VERSE 16). Let's begin with verse 16 which says,

Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all! 2 Thessalonians 3:16 (NASB)

Here Paul shares his desire that these believers would experience peace in every circumstance. This would have been especially important for these believers since they were under persecution by the secular world. They were also struggling inside the church with what Paul called lazy believers who were "sponging off" those who were working. We can imagine how guilty the working believers might have felt when the lazy believers begged for food for their wives or children. So, to hear that their apostle desired that they would have peace in every circumstance would have been encouraging.

But about what kind of peace was Paul talking? He was not referring to the shallow, political peace that is the result of treaties among nations. He was not referring to the superficial peace between neighbors, friends, or family members, or perfunctory polite communication. Paul was referring to divine peace. In verse 16, Paul packs four principles about divine peace into this one verse.

1st - Christ is the Source of Peace. The first principle that Paul gives us in 2 Thessalonians 3:16 is that divine peace comes from the "Lord of peace." This is the only time this phrase appears in Scripture. If you were to search the Bible for the term "God of peace," you would find that it occurs five times in the New Testament (Romans 15:33; 16:20; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20). The first time it occurs

is in Romans 15:33. Paul wrote,

Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen. Romans 15:33 (NASB)

The fourth time Paul uses the phrase is in 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely. . . . 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NASB)

Each time this phrase, the God of peace, refers to God the Father. That is, God the Father is the God of peace. In Judges 6:24 we are told "the Lord is peace." It also refers to God the Father. But here in 2 Thessalonians 3:16, the phrase "the Lord of peace" refers to Christ. Now do not miss an important truth. Notice that Paul has just attributed divine peace as coming from both the Father and Christ. Now we have just discovered something else in this verse. This is another proof that Christ and the Father are equal.

Next, notice that Paul adds "Himself" into the statement "the Lord of peace Himself." Paul emphasized that Christ alone is the source of divine peace. He did this by placing the Greek word for "Himself," *autos*, first in the sentence. Paul's point is that peace only comes from Christ —the Lord of peace! For example, on the night that Christ was born, a host of angels announced to the shepherds in the field at night,

*Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.
Luke 2:14 (NASB)*

Now it's obvious that the birth of Christ did not result in world peace. So what type of peace did the angels refer to? The answer is given to us in John 14:27. In this verse Jesus is explaining the type of peace He gives. He said,

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. John 14:27 (NASB)

You see, Jesus is the source of divine peace. Men cannot give the world or individuals true peace—divine peace! Do not look to a Christian counselor as the source of peace. One of the great tragedies of Christian counseling is that believers tend to look to their counselor as the source of their peace. The source of peace is not a counselor, a judge, or your father or mother. The source of true peace is Christ.

This would have been a wonderful reminder for these believers who were suffering. It would have focused them on Christ, who is the source and author of peace. In Christ's sovereignty He can give them peace in every situation and trial. Christ is the Lord of peace.

2nd - Christ Continually Grants Peace. The second principle that Paul gives us in 2 Thessalonians 3:16 is that Christ can continually grant peace. If Jesus, Himself, is the only source then believers must go to Him to obtain peace. Now there are three truths about this peace that Christ offers. I would like to take the time to discuss each one.

1) Peace Comes At Salvation. The first truth about divine peace is that when Jesus died on the cross, He brought peace between those who believe in Christ and God the Father. Maybe the clearest verse is Colossians 1:20. It says,

... and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross . . . Colossians 1:20 (NASB)

Scripture tells us that Jesus has made peace with God the Father available to us when He died on the cross! 1 Peter 2:24 says that our sins were placed in Christ's body while He hung on the cross and then He died. The result is that now we can be free from the slavery to sin. 1 Peter 3:18 adds that when Christ died, He was then able to bring us to God the Father. There is no danger! The point of all of this is that believers have positional peace with God. Listen to Romans 5:1,

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . Romans 5:1 (NASB)

If you are a believer, did you know that you have peace with God the Father? That was the purpose of Christ dying on the

cross. As a result, when a person believes in Christ, Romans 8:1 says,

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 (NASB)

Every believer has eternal peace with God! That is why we are going to heaven. That is why Paul says we are sitting in heaven and Peter says we already have a reservation in heaven. No pastor or church leader can do that. No family member or friend can do that. Only Christ who is the source of peace can grant us true peace. So, the first principle of divine peace is that faith in Christ gives us peace with the Father at the moment of saving faith. I call this positional peace. We are no longer condemned before God. We are at peace with the Father forever.

2) Peace is Available in Relationships. The second truth about divine peace is that Christ also offers peace now in this present life for believers. This a relational peace. But that is not true for the unbeliever. God says in Isaiah 48:22,

There is no peace for the wicked . . . Isaiah 48:22 (NASB)

In sharp contrast, Psalm 85:10 connects righteous living with peace. It declares,

Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Psalm 85:10 (NASB)

That is, peace comes only by being righteous. As believers live righteously, the Holy Spirit does not convict us of sin. But when we sin, the Holy Spirit convicts believers of their sin and makes them feel terrible (John 16:8-11). At that point, believers have grieved the Spirit and the only way we can restore peace in our relationship with God is by confessing our sins (1 John 1:9). That restores our day-to-day relationship with God.

Galatians 5:16-23 teaches us how to maintain that relationship more effectively. It says that believers must walk in the Spirit day-to-day. As we read Scripture, confess our sins and pray, we will sin less and less, and the fruit of the Spirit will grow in us more and more. And what is the result? Galatians 5:22 says,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . . Galatians 5:22 (NASB)

That is, we experience peace within as we walk in the Spirit.

As we walk in the Spirit, we will maintain peace not only with God, but also with other believers. Ephesians 4:3 makes this surprising statement. It says,

. . . being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:3 (NASB)

Notice that we are told unity of the Spirit exists in the body of Christ. But we can damage this relational peace or unity when we sin. So, Paul says preserve it. Now Matthew 5:9 reveals that the unique mark of believers is that they are peacemakers! The reason believers can be peacemakers is that only believers can live righteously by the Holy Spirit. So, what is it like in your home between you and your spouse? The point is,

. . . the work of righteousness will be peace . . . Isaiah 32:17 (NASB)

So, believers have peace with God. We can have peace within, and we can have peace with others as we walk in the Spirit. Christ grants that to us.

3) Peace Will Be Eternal. The third truth about divine peace is that Christ gives believers a future peace. This will occur when He reigns in the kingdom as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). During His reign there will be unprecedented peace on earth. But the ultimate peace is found in the eternal heaven or eternal state when sin will no longer exist (Revelation 21:3-4, 8-9; 22:15).

3rd - Peace is Available Every Moment. The third principle that Paul gives us in 2 Thessalonians 3:16 is that peace is available in every circumstance or situation. Since Christ can grant peace continually, then He also can do it in every situation. Philippians 4:6-7 was written by Paul when he was in a Roman prison. Listen to his words,

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 (NASB)

As we pray and trust Christ, Christ will grant us peace continually in every circumstance. I rejoice that divine peace is available to us!

4th - Lord of Peace is With Us. The fourth principle that Paul gives us in 2 Thessalonians 3:16 is that Christ will always be with us.

The Lord be with you all! 2 Thessalonians 3:16 (NASB)

Now Paul is not implying that Christ is not always with us because Jesus has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Matthew 28:20). Paul also knew that God is omnipresent. So, what was Paul saying? I believe Paul was simply expressing his desire that Christ, the Lord of peace, would make his prayer happen—make it a reality. There is also another possibility. Do you remember when Jesus told us to pray that the Father's kingdom would come, even though Scripture has already prophesied that the kingdom is going to come? Why pray if the kingdom is certain? Jesus never explains! But the answer seems to be that at least we express our desire that His kingdom come too! Therefore, it may be that Paul was praying for what he already knew Christ would do. The Lord of peace would never leave them. The truth is the Lord of peace will never leave us! What a great encouragement.

PAUL'S ENCOURAGEMENT. Verse 17 records these words from Paul,

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. 2 Thessalonians 3:17 (NASB)

This could be a digression in Paul's benediction between verses 16 and 18. But I think verse 17 is another encouragement to these believers. Paul wanted them to know that he was the author of this letter. That is, their apostle cared for them. It was important that Paul do this since 2 Thessalonians 2:2 hints that someone in the church was teaching doctrinal error.

Paul told them that he was writing this letter. So, he signed the letter at the end. Now it was common in Paul's era for a writer to dictate a letter to someone else and then add a personal greeting at the end of the letter. Paul added greetings at the end of 1 Corinthians, Colossians, and Philemon. In Galatians 6:11 Paul wrote these words,

*See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.
Galatians 6:11 (NASB)*

This helps us understand that Paul's handwriting was large and, in some way, unusual. This would have been another encouragement to these believers. Paul the apostle not only wrote this letter, he also cared for them. We could say that he gave them assurance or peace.

LORD GIVES US GRACE. Then Paul ended this letter with a statement that appears in different forms at the end of several of his letters (Romans 16:24; 1 Corinthians 16:23; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 6:18; Ephesians 6:24; Philippians 4:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:28; 2 Timothy 4:22; Titus 3:15; Philemon 25),

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. 2 Thessalonians 3:18 (NASB)

Just as we saw that the Lord of peace gives us peace at the moment of salvation, throughout this earthly life, and into eternity, the same is true of divine grace. Ephesians tells us that we are saved by grace. Because of God's grace we were chosen and saved. That is how we became a believer.

Then Romans 5:2 says we are living by God's grace right now.

... through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:2 (NASB)

Finally, 1 Peter 1:13 tells us that there is a future grace. It occurs at the second coming of Christ. So grace caused us to be saved. We are living in grace and there is a future grace.

Hebrews 4:16 is like a ribbon on a gift. It promises that

when we encounter trials and difficulties we can go to the throne of grace and ask for help. Here is the verse,

Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16 (NASB)

What a wonderful verse for these struggling believers and for us! When we are struggling, the Lord of peace is with us to give us peace, mercy, and grace at our time of need! He does it just at the right time.

CONCLUSION. This has been an encouraging letter for me! It was written by an apostle approved by the Lord Jesus. We have learned that because we are saved by grace, we have peace with the Father forever. Because we are living in grace, we can have peace now in this life as we live a righteous life. Because there is a future grace, the promise of future peace is real. Christ will make this all happen. Peace and grace are available every day and in every circumstance through Christ and Christ alone!