
1 Thessalonians 1:10 -- 2:6

Awaiting His Son -- Seven Contrasts -- Entrusted with the Gospel

Bible Reading

Opening Reading -- 1 Thessalonians 1:10 -- 2:6

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And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: that even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully treated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

Await His Son: The Son as Direct Object

The closing verse of chapter 1 sets out the posture of the Thessalonian converts in its fullest form: turned from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await His Son from heaven. There is a slight but real difference of shade between 'waiting for the Son' and the way Darby renders it: 'to await his Son.' In Darby's construction, the Lord Jesus Himself -- His person -- is the direct object of the

verb. It is not merely that they are waiting for a certain event, a prophetic fulfillment, a sequence of things to occur. The Son is the one they are awaiting. He himself is the object of their expectation.

C.H.M. observed the difference between holding premillennial doctrine and having the Lord Jesus as a personal, living object of the heart's expectation. Premillennial doctrine may be held intellectually. But this is what engages the heart -- His person. Simeon and Anna illustrate it. When the parents brought the child Jesus to the temple, they found not a doctrine confirmed but a person present. Simeon said it was time to depart in peace -- the direct object of his hope was there. Anna spoke of Him to all who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem. She was looking for a person, and she found Him. The hope of Israel is not a programme but a person: 'Christ Jesus our hope' (1 Timothy 1:1). And he who is the hope of earthly Israel is the same Son whom we await from heaven.

The Wrath to Come: Not Narrowed to the Great Tribulation

The phrase 'delivered us from the wrath to come' has been seized upon by some as a proof text for the pre-tribulation rapture, on the grounds that the wrath to come is the Great Tribulation. But this is an interpretive step, not an express statement of Scripture. Darby's rendering, 'from the coming wrath,' is more general -- and the wrath spoken of elsewhere in Paul's writings (Romans 1; Romans 5:9) is not limited to a seven-year period but encompasses the final and eternal wrath of God upon the ungodly. There is no compelling necessity to read Great Tribulation here. The verse is consistent with a pre-tribulation exclusion of the church from that time, but it does not expressly teach it.

That exclusion is more directly expressed in Revelation 3:10: 'I will keep thee from the hour of trial' -- not merely from the trial itself, but from the hour, the time of it. The six passages in Scripture that speak directly of that epoch show Gentiles coming out of it, Jacob going through it, and the church kept from the

hour of it. None of them places the church within it. The best that can be said about the verse before us is that it is not contradictory to the pre-tribulation hope -- but to make it the proof text for that hope is to read in an interpretation rather than read out an express statement.

Chapter 2 Flows from Chapter 1: Entrance Not in Vain

The chapter divisions of 1 Thessalonians were made by a man, not by God. The close of chapter 1 and the opening of chapter 2 flow without interruption. The posture of chapter 1 verse 10 -- awaiting the Son from heaven -- immediately connects with the character of the ministry that planted that posture in the Thessalonians' hearts. 'For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain.' What was Paul's entrance at Thessalonica? Chapter 2 answers the question with both a negative and a positive sweep. The negative comes first: seven things that were not there.

Seven Contrasts: What Was Not Present at Thessalonica

Verses 3 through 6 give seven things that characterized neither Paul's motive, method, nor manner at Thessalonica. They make a complete and instructive list -- a kind of anatomy of what false or corrupt ministry looks like, so that the field is cleared before the positive side is stated in verse 7.

Verse 3 gives three: deceit (the error, the wrong content); uncleanness (the motive, something impure underlying the ministry); and guile (the method, trying to manipulate people into something by deception). These three together are really the anatomy of a scam. And it is worth observing that the idols, by their very nature, are built on all three. They use deceit -- they are false. Their motive is to seduce souls into uncleanness. Their method is guile and falsehood. The gospel comes as the precise opposite of everything that idolatry is.

Verse 4: not pleasing men but God. God approves our hearts -- that is, He tests them. He does not immediately test the audience; He tests the preacher. Is Christ Himself enough to motivate the heart? Is the gospel sufficient as its own reward? Or is something else needed alongside it -- flattery, money, recognition? The test comes in, and the soul of the servant is proved. Like Balaam, who promised to speak only what God told him, yet could not stop thinking about the room full of silver and gold. God was watching Balaam's heart. He watches ours.

Verse 5 adds two more: no flattering words -- Paul's hearers could judge this for themselves, they were present -- and no cloak of covetousness. Flattery is visible from the outside; covetousness hides inside, beneath the surface. So the Thessalonians are cited as witnesses to the absence of flattery, but God is cited as the witness to the absence of covetousness. One is for public observation, the other for divine scrutiny. Flattery is manipulative -- it is an insincerity designed to bring people under the flatterer's will. The word of God, by contrast, is designed to bring us under God's will. A ministry mixed with flattery is working at cross purposes with the message it carries.

Verse 6 gives the seventh: not seeking glory from men. There is a reciprocal action of the flesh here. The preacher flatters the audience; the audience gives glory to the preacher. Herod made an oration, the people said it was the voice of a god, and he did not give God the glory -- and was smitten and died. That is where the seeking of glory from men leads. Christians unitedly should be seeking God's glory alone. Everything else is vanity. Paul sought no glory from the Thessalonians nor from others -- and having said that, he adds with characteristic grace: 'when we might have been a charge as Christ's apostles.'

Entrusted with the Gospel: God Is Not Looking for Volunteers

Verse 4 contains the positive foundation beneath all seven negatives: 'but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak.' John

Begg once said plainly: 'God is not looking for volunteers, brethren.' That is exactly the point of verse 4. Paul and his companions were not a group who had decided to take up gospel ministry because it seemed like a good cause. They were approved of God and entrusted with the glad tidings -- as in Acts 13, where the Spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul by a direct divine choice, not by human volunteer initiative.

To be entrusted with something is to be made responsible for it. When Ezra brought up the temple vessels from Babylon, a careful inventory was made at the beginning, and an accounting was taken at the end. Nothing was to be lost. The gospel entrusted to Paul and his companions required the same kind of care: to keep it pure, to preach it faithfully, to discharge the ministry given in a way that honored the Lord whose gospel it was. The health-and-wealth gospel, and all its cousins, fail precisely at this point. The man who preaches such things says: I suddenly found this, I discovered it and want you to know. The apostle says: I was entrusted with it -- which is a fundamentally different moral foundation for ministry.

A Charge, Not a Burden: Darby's Translation of Verse 6

The King James Version ends verse 6 with 'when we might have been burdensome.' But Darby's translation is more precise and considerably more beautiful: 'when we might have been a charge as Christ's apostles.' The difference matters. A burden is an oppressive weight laid upon someone. A charge is what goes on the account -- like the Good Samaritan who told the innkeeper that whatever more was spent, he would repay it when he came back. An apostle of the Lord Jesus coming to a community might have been a temporary cost to them -- something that went on the tab. But the Lord Jesus is no man's debtor. If He sends a servant, He will repay everything. There is no burden in having an apostle of Christ visit. There is a temporary charge, and an eternal repayment that

makes it an incomparable privilege.

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Lord willing.