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2nd Thessalonians In Paul's Writings

Alright, today we're going to begin working with Paul's 2nd epistle to the Thessalonians. As always, when we begin one of Paul's epistles we want to review the whole corpus of Paul's writings. This will help you over the years if you train yourself to see all of Paul's writings and not just bury yourself in one at a time. You need both, you need the big picture and you need the individual pieces. So today we'll be looking at the big picture and then we'll introduce the individual piece called 2 Thessalonians.

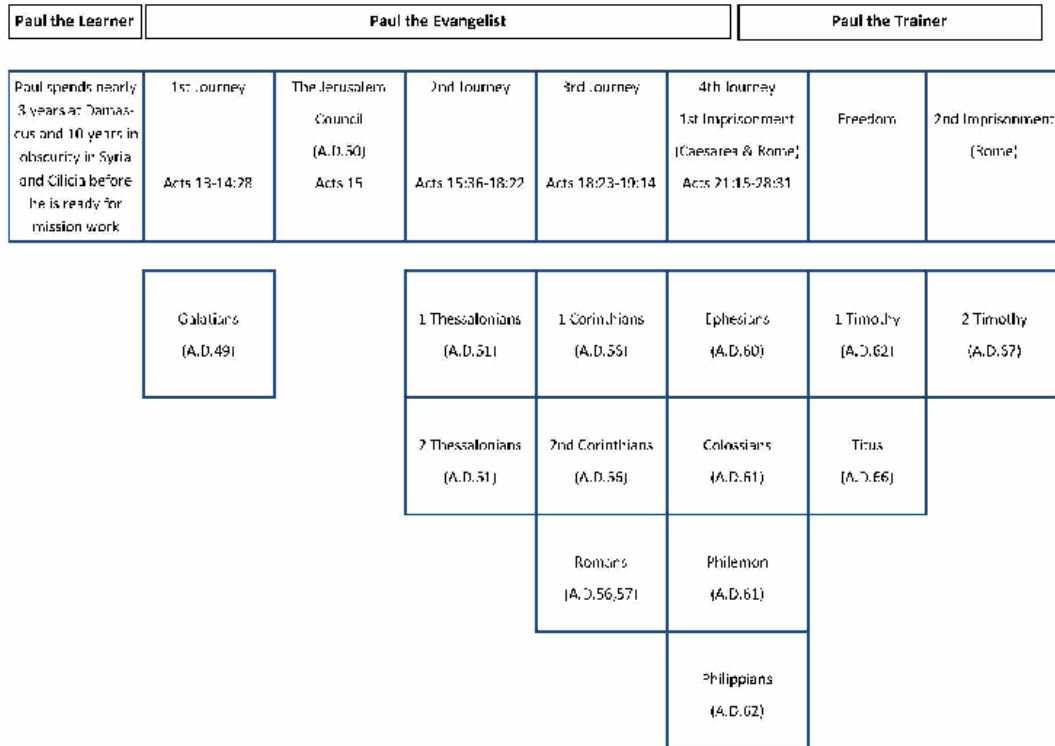
So if you look at the index in your Bible you have OT and NT. In the OT there are 39 books and in the NT you have 27 books for a total of 66 books, what has been called the divine library; these are the only books God ever wrote. He didn't write the Koran, He didn't write the Book of Mormon, and it doesn't bother me at all if you burn either one of those books. It's not even going to bother me if you burn the Bible, the king did that back in Jeremiah's day and God the Holy Spirit just re-wrote it, so you can burn the Bible all you want but you're never going to get rid of it. God is bigger than us. His word is eternal. It cannot be destroyed. It will last forever and ever and if you try to destroy it you'll lose because you'll just be wasting good fuel. The word of God says not one *yod* or *serif* will be destroyed; *yod* is the smallest letter of the Hebrew language. And a *serif* is the tiny projection you see on the ends of letters in certain writing styles. And the point of statements like not one *yod* or *serif* will be destroyed is to emphasize that that the word of God is the word of God and therefore it's eternal, just as God can never pass away so God's word can never pass away.

So that's what these books are in your index. Down in the NT section you see the four Gospels listed; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first three are called the synoptics because they look at the events from the same

perspective. They differ of course, but all look at the events as historical facts. John is not part of the synoptics because it looks at the historical facts from a theological perspective, it's an interpretation of the historical facts, and it tells their significance. Then you see Acts and Acts is the first church history book. It covers the transition period when God's kingdom program for Israel was fading out and God's program for the Church was fading in. Then you see Romans. Romans is the first book in the list written by Paul. And Paul wrote everything from Romans straight down to Philemon, there are 13 books in a row and Paul wrote all of them. Starting with Romans, but Romans is not the first letter Paul wrote, 1 Cor isn't second and 2 Cor isn't third, which tells us that the order here is not the order he wrote them. Anyone know why this is the order they were put in? Because Romans is the longest and Philemon is the shortest. So someone went in and counted the words of all 13 epistles and then they just put them in the order from the longest to the shortest. So, while that may interest us we'd like to know the actual order in which he wrote his letters.

Why do we want to know the actual order? What difference does it make? All the letters were written under divine inspiration and are infallible so who cares? Well, the truth of the matter is that the apostles were human beings and as human beings they grew spiritually. Therefore there is a progression in their spiritual growth as the Holy Spirit worked in their lives. For example, in 1 Thessalonians we saw that Paul was anxious, he was anxious to know how the Thessalonians were doing and he was unable to rest in the Lord and trust Him with his new converts. He had not yet mastered the art of being anxious for nothing. Ten years later he will have grown so that in Philippians he will write, "Be anxious for nothing." He had, for the most part, mastered anxiety. So there is a progression to Paul's spiritual growth and if you study his writings sequentially you will see this progression. If you don't you won't see the progression. So one of the background things we are pointing out as we go through Paul's letters is the progress of his spiritual growth.

The easiest way to remember the order Paul wrote these books is to connect them to his four missionary journeys. You've seen this before but if you will keep coming back to it finally it will sink in and Paul's writings will come to make more and more sense to you. Now Paul's four missionary journeys are described in Acts 13-28 and I've given you a chart so let's look at the chart.



There are several things on the chart that are helpful but right now we just want to key in on Paul's missionary journeys. So find Paul's 1st Journey and stay with me. The 1st Journey is recorded in Acts 13-14. And how many letters did Paul write out of that Journey? One. What is it? Galatians. He actually wrote it between Acts 14 and 15, there's some time in between there when the Galatian problem surfaced which prompted the letter. What year did he write it? AD49. We studied Galatians six months ago. What were the two doctrines Paul taught the Galatians? Justification by grace through faith and sanctification by grace through faith. Always remember that both justification and sanctification occur by the same mechanics, you're not justified by grace through faith and then you're sanctified by works, you're justified by grace through faith and you're sanctified by grace through faith. That's the Book of Galatians. Then on the chart, the next box to the right is the Jerusalem Council that occurred in Acts 15, it was AD50. After the Jerusalem Council you see Paul's 2nd Journey. And out of that journey how many epistles did Paul write? Two. 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians, both in the year AD51. We just finished 1 Thessalonians and this letter came only a few months later so the background is very similar though there are some things that happened in between that distinguish the occasion of

writing. The verse frame for the 2nd Journey is Acts 15:36-18:22. Next we have Paul's 3rd Journey. How many letters did he write? Three. Do you see the pattern? 1st Journey, one letter, 2nd Journey, two letters, 3rd Journey, three letters. This is just to help. So to be thorough, on the 3rd Journey Paul writes 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians and Romans. Then we come to the 4th Journey, or what they call the 1st Imprisonment, which was actually a missionary journey too since Paul evangelized the whole Praetorian Guard in Rome. And during that 4th Journey he writes, you guessed it, four epistles, so that keeps with the pattern. He writes Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians, sometimes called the prison epistles. Then the last three epistles break the pattern, they come after the Book of Acts was published, and they are 1 Timothy, Titus and 2 Timothy. In all Paul wrote 13 epistles which is a hefty chunk of your NT.

So we've already taught Paul's earliest epistle, Galatians, people will debate some of the order so the order I'm teaching them in is the order I've decided I think is correct. Galatians comes first, then 1 Thessalonians and now 2 Thessalonians. Actually some people think 2 Thessalonians comes before 1 Thessalonians and there are about ten arguments that try to prove this but the arguments haven't convinced many people and they don't convince me either. So we're going one, two, three, and this is a strategy in my teaching here. There is a strategy to my madness, this is not just random. I don't just pick a book or a passage. There is a strategy here. And this particular strategy has to do with the question, what is the church and how does it develop and what are the norms and standards for the church. So to solve these kinds of questions I outlined three tactics or stages in reaching these goals.

The first stage was to get the background for all of the NT writings by studying the first church history book. That's the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts gives a solid foundation on which to build because most of the NT epistles were written during that period of time. The Book of Acts argues that Christ rose from the dead and that He ascended and is now seated in session at the right hand of the Father. From there He sent the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. So Christ left but the Holy Spirit came to form a new body called the Church. This body began in Jerusalem, moved out into Judea and Samaria and eventually reached the remotest parts of the earth. The Book of Acts charts the progress of the gospel beginning with Jews, then adding

Samaritans and finally Gentiles. These are all entering into this new body called the Church by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ. So Acts is reporting how this took place and the signs and miracles God the Holy Spirit did to authenticate that this indeed was what God was doing during this transition period from Israel to the Church.

The second part of this strategy is to understand that most of the NT epistles were written during this period. Since a new body had been formed then new revelation was being given to govern this body. So the earlier books are going to be more suited for new believers, to help them get established in the milk doctrines, the later books are going to be more suited for advanced believer, to give them a constant diet of meat doctrine. So there are three stages of writings. I call them infancy, childhood and adulthood and we want to review these. Infancy writings means the focus is on the basic Christian doctrine, infancy is just a label, it's not knocking it, just like a baby needs milk to grow, a new or immature believer needs milk doctrine and this first category is all about milk doctrine. Second there are childhood writings and these focus on intermediate Christian doctrine, you've been through the basics, you've grown on the milk, now it's time to start eating meat and so this category is sort of a mixture of milk and meat. Third, there are adult writings and these focus on advanced Christian doctrine. This is an advanced diet of Bible doctrine, its pure meat doctrine. So there's progression from infancy to childhood to adulthood in Paul's epistles. And each stage in the progression is vital to a vital Christian development. So we want to review what writings are in what categories and what the major themes are of each epistle.

The first category, the infant writings, he wrote on missionary journey's 1, 2 and 3, so you might shade the box somewhere, somehow annotate that the books from these three journeys' are all in the first category of what I call infancy, they cover basic Christian doctrine, milk. Now don't be embarrassed if you haven't grown beyond this milk stage. Hardly any Christians in the world today have grown beyond this stage and there are historical reasons for that but the main reason is lack of Bible teaching since the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy in the 1920's. And this explains why there is a lot of debate right now on Paul's writings going on in academia, particularly with Paul's letter to the Galatians and the Romans. Those are both infancy writings but two mainstream theologians, John Piper and N.T. Wright are butting heads on what Paul means by justification by faith and what Paul

meant by saying justification is not by works of the Law and there's a big controversy brewing called *The New Perspective on Paul* and it's been brewing since 1978 but it's coming to a head now and I've read enough of both sides to say that I don't agree with either Piper or Wright. So my point in bringing up the current controversy is to highlight the fact that this is milk doctrine and yet top theologians can't figure out what Paul is saying and that is manifesting the lack of Bible teaching in the last 100 years.

So to try to bring a level of maturity to the Church we're starting with these basic books. It doesn't hurt to go through the books in the order God the Holy Spirit revealed them. That is the order in which He taught the Church and so we might take that as a hint that He has a curriculum, that there's a pedagogy involved here. And if that's so then you have to go through lesson 1, then lesson 2, then lesson 3 and so forth. You don't do lesson 54 before you do lesson 4 because there's an order to the curriculum and if you miss lesson 5 you miss lesson 6, 7, 8 and so forth. So the infant doctrines are necessary.

Let's look at them. Galatians, how is a sinner justified before God and how does a justified sinner then grow spiritually, get sanctified? That's fundamental, if you don't have that what do you have? Paul's answer is that a sinner is justified by grace through faith and a justified sinner is sanctified by grace through faith. Then you have 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians, they are both about Bible prophecy and Bible prophecy is very practical for day to day living; we've been following this and we'll continue with this into 2 Thessalonians. When you get up in the morning what's your basic focus from morning till evening? What do you think about? What is your motive to live? Do you really love the Lord's appearing? Does it mean anything to you that Christ might come back today? Or is this just a part of your creed? And prayerfully you will learn how to focus your attention on Christ's any-moment coming through these two epistles. Then you have 1 and 2 Corinthians, they're both dealing with problems of carnality, the stuff new believers struggle with, breaking old sin patterns, the importance of spiritual gifts and which ones are most important, (not tongues by the way, tongues is at the bottom of the list). And finally in the infancy writings you have Romans and Romans is the church's first systematic theology, it centers on the righteousness of God and the salvific plan of God, it elaborates on the themes of Galatians so there is an advance. It also answers the question of what is God doing with the nation Israel during this time. Has the Church

replaced Israel or has Israel merely been set aside temporarily? And all six of these books are Christianity 101.

The second category of Paul's writings was composed during the fourth missionary journey, those four books are listed where it says Paul's 1st Imprisonment. All four of those are what we've called childhood and they focus on intermediate Christian doctrine. The structure in these books is always doctrine first and then application or experience, how the doctrine works. So there's a mix of doctrine and experience in these books.

Ephesians deals with our victory in Christ, how can we have total victory in Christ and yet a spiritual conflict is still raging? The answer is that Christ has conquered and He is crowned King but He has yet to take His crown and rule His kingdom. In the meantime He is forming a new organism called the Church which is neither Jew nor Gentile. The Church is given spiritually gifted men to engage in the spiritual conflict that wages in the heavenly places between the angels by putting on the full armor of God. Philippians furthers this by dealing with unity. In a conflict all the soldiers have to work together, if that is the case then they have to be likeminded. This likemindedness has to center on Jesus Christ who showed us what life really is. He showed us that the only real life in this world is Him. And so to really live life we have to live as He did, humbling ourselves before God and submitting to Him in every area of life. Then we have Colossians and it's about the pre-eminence of Christ, how Christ is central to our thought life, how every thought must be taken captive to Him, that He is the starting point for all proper thinking and how Satan's strategy is to get us to start somewhere else in our thinking so that he can disarm us in the conflict. Philemon gives a street look at the doctrine of justification by faith through the illustration of a slave being set free. These four books are intermediate doctrines, a gradual move from milk to meat doctrine.

The third group is adulthood and these were written after Paul's 1st imprisonment. These books all present advanced Bible doctrine, pure meat. These three books are called the Pastoral Epistles which means they are all about shepherding. They are very important because they were written near the end of the transitional period, near AD70. The apostles are dying off and so we have emphasis placed on eldership and deacons since they will shepherd the church of God during it's normative period. These define the

norm of the church for all time. They are almost purely doctrinal. There is very little about experience in the Pastoral Epistles. 1 Timothy deals with how to guard the church against false teachers. This requires depth of insight into what is going on in the culture outside the church and inside the church so that you can guard your people against these false ideas that seep into the cracks of every church. It also shows how to deal with various groups in the church that are upsetting people and that takes a lot of skill in Bible knowledge and wisdom. It's all for mature believers. Titus gives you the qualifications of elders and again, how to spot false teachers. It is very intensely concerned with the dangers of false teaching both from the world outside the church, the wolves that are satanically inspired to come into the church and like wolves destroy the sheep, as well as from within, people inside the church that unwittingly destroy. False teaching is the fourth most discussed doctrine in the entire NT. Finally 2 Timothy gives a challenge to endure, in it Paul predicts the church will go apostate and so you are going to be tempted to go after every fad the church is going after but Paul encourages pastors to endure with sound teaching to their flocks trying to protect them from the last days apostasy that will grow worse and worse. So understand that pastors who preach the word are working themselves out of a job. But God is faithful. Hold fast to the truth. Hold fast the word of life.

And finally, the third aspect of this strategy. One is to teach the first church history book, the Book of Acts. Two is to understand that Paul's epistles were written during the Book of Acts and they move from infancy to childhood to adulthood. Three is to recognize that Paul grew spiritually throughout his writings. This should at least encourage you that the apostles didn't have it any easier than you do. They had to grow spiritually the same way you did. And there are places in Paul's epistles where you can tell he was failing. I've already cited some. So we're trying to document this as an encouragement.

We said generally speaking that as Paul advanced spiritually his focus shifted from evangelism to training. Early on Paul was vocal, he was interactive, he was in the synagogue, he was in the streets. Early on he's very public in his ministry and very evangelistic. Later Paul realized his time on earth was coming to an end and so he began to shift from evangelism to training. He began to lecture for hours and hours in the halls of the ancient world, he began to isolate himself and spend time with his best students, men who were elders, and pour into them his knowledge through teaching so they

could carry on the ministry when he was gone. So he begins to slip away and become more private, he's studying more, he's writing more, he's behind closed doors and you can see on the chart, that his writing ministry intensifies until near the end of his life when it tapers off. So that increase in writing is a sign that you are near the end of your life and you want to leave something in the hands of the people that they can go back to over and over and establish more and more men who could lead the church, more and more men who could preach the word when you're gone.

Now that we've given the strategy of what we're doing let's turn our attention to 2 Thessalonians and I'll give you the occasion, an outline and the theme.

The occasion of this letter is similar to 1 Thessalonians. They're only written a few months apart, maybe 3-6 months, so there are similarities to the occasion. Remember Paul went into Thessalonica with Silas and Timothy and they did some evangelism and then followed up quickly with training. But during the training there was a Satanic hindrance because the gospel was making deep inroads and Satan is not going to let that go on so he applied pressure. The local authorities wanted to arrest Paul and Silas so they identified their location, at a believer named Jason's house, they went in to make the arrest but couldn't find them so they arrested Jason and some other new believers and threw them in the slammer. They decided to make a deal with them and the deal was we'll let you boys out of prison if you'll pay bail of \$5,000, but if Paul and Silas ever come back we're going to throw you right back in the slammer. So they got out but Paul and Silas got locked out, their training was cut short. So there was persecution going on at Thessalonica and it was transferred from Paul and Silas to the believers at Thessalonica. So they had to endure trials and tribulations and Paul encourages them to keep standing firm in the first letter. By the time the second letter is written three things have happened. One, the persecution has increased. Partly because the Thessalonians had such a fantastic testimony, their testimony was known throughout all of Macedonia and Achaia and beyond. So they were a threat to Satan's program and so he's increasing the pressure to stop evangelism. Second, false teachers have arrived and deceived the Thessalonians into thinking that their persecutions are characteristic of the day of the Lord and so the deception is they've already entered the day of the Lord. They hadn't but they thought they had and so Paul writes to correct this doctrinal error. Third, more of the Thessalonians had quit working

because since they were already in the day of the Lord there was no use working since in the Kingdom all their personal possessions would be taken and a redistribution of assets occur. So Paul writes to encourage them in the midst of persecution, correct the doctrinal error that they were in the day of the Lord and to exhort them to get to work.

So we'll be continuing along the lines of prophecy, the major theme of the letter is the day of the Lord and how the Thessalonians were not in the day of the Lord. They were facing persecution, all Christians face it to some degree, but those persecutions were not in the day of the Lord because the apostasy and the revealing of the Antichrist had not occurred. And since those are the opening indicators that the day of the Lord had begun then they could not possibly be in that day. So we can be encouraged when we're facing persecution because one day God is going to rapture us and judge our enemies. So we have the same two major doctrines from 1 Thessalonians involved in 2 Thessalonians, the rapture and the day of the Lord. And 2 Thessalonians teaches the same thing as 1 Thessalonians so far as the timing of these two events is concerned. The rapture and the day of the Lord are both imminent and will occur simultaneously. They are two sides of the same moment.

Prophecy is basic doctrine and at least a basic understanding of prophecy is an essential ingredient to the Christian life. I hope it becomes a living reality for you because while it concerns facts about the future it is relevant to the present. As William Blackstone said, "The greater part of this Scripture consists of prophecy, and if Christians would give more attention to it, they would not find themselves distracted from present service, but 'they would find much light thrown on their present path, much practical encouragement given to their ministry.' Their faith would rest upon a broader and deeper comprehension of God's character and ways, and their spiritual horizon would stand out in clearer outline than before." Now, to throw light on your present path and give you practical encouragement it must have one element. Without this element it does very little. That element is the imminent return of Jesus Christ. As Dr John Walvoord says, "One of the reasons for presenting the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ is that it is an impelling motive to be living for Him every day...It makes a tremendous difference whether Christ is coming now or whether our prospect is that we will go through the tribulation." Notice that last expression, it makes a

tremendous difference whether Christ is coming now or whether our prospect is that we will go through the tribulation. You know people, I know people who think they are going to enter into what most people call the tribulation and have to undergo those judgments. They come in all flavors, mid-trib, post-trib, partial rapture and pre-wrath. If we hold to any one of these views then should we be looking for Christ? Why would we be looking for Christ if AntiChrist is coming before Christ? See, it makes no sense to be looking for Christ if AntiChrist will come before Him. And if AntiChrist is coming before Christ then I am going to look for AntiChrist and prepare to live under his rule? Which is what much of the Christian world is doing. Because they reject the imminent return of Christ and think that they may live to enter the tribulation period they are preparing to live in that world. Therefore they are not really living the way God wants them to live in this world. They are not focusing on the things that God wants us to be focusing on. What does God want us to focus on now? Christ. To be waiting expectantly for Christ. What does it mean to be looking for Christ? To be waiting expectantly for Him? Well, one thing it does not mean is standing on your porch or on a hill somewhere staring into the sky. This is what the Millerites and others have been doing for the last two centuries. Every once in a while someone they are impressed with sets a date for Christ's return and then they all go climb a hill and stare into the sky. This is not what it means to be looking for Christ. It doesn't mean physically staring somewhere, it means living in light of His coming. It means that each moment of your life may be the last moment of your life and therefore you are living every moment as if it is your last. You are living in obedience to Him, not in rebellion. You are living for His glory, not for your own. You are living like Paul who ran all over the ancient world. You are living as if you are living at the very end of history.

There is no time, we can't slow down living the Christian life just because we have aches and pains. What this gets down to is what you really think is important in life? What are you living for? Now I realize that there are times when this truth puts you to shame. I have personally been put to shame a number of times and I have gone to my wife and said, I don't feel like I am doing anything for Christ, I just study and teach and yet there are people all over the world who need Christ, maybe we should go into missions somewhere. And it's difficult because I know being here with you and teaching the word is necessary, that that is an important function, but at the

same time you can think, well, I think I'll stay here where I can live in comfort and security and just study the word. So am I fooling myself?

And you have all these kinds of questions because I see the life of Paul and I don't see any I in there, it's not about I, it's about Christ. I see a man who was content whether he had much or little, I see a man who risked his life, I see a man who was beaten several times 40-1 lashes, who was stoned, who was run out of town on a rail, and for only one reason. Christ. Christ is coming. He's coming today. And I have to ask myself, Are you living like that or is that just your doctrinal statement? See, we've lost that sense of the urgency of living in light of Christ's coming. Almost 2000 years have passed and most of the time our attitude is, Jesus isn't really coming today, it's been almost 2,000 years, it probably won't be today, this week or this year. Certain things have to happen first. Or, I hope He doesn't come today because if He does then I won't get to do X, you fill in the blank, I won't get to marry or I won't get to have kids or I won't get to have ice cream this afternoon, and that only shows us how shallow our impression of what He has in store for us is. Are we really living like He's coming today or is that just what we say we believe?

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