

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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When?

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, KJV 1900)

In previous studies, I have mentioned that some believers wrongly think that Paul and the other apostles sincerely believed that the Second Coming and resurrection would occur during their lifetime. Our present study passage emphatically confronts and rejects this idea. It was this idea that the Thessalonians wrongly believed and that Paul confronted and refuted in these verses, so we cannot ignore such passages as this and think that Paul wrongly believed that the Second Coming would occur during his lifetime. If he believed this idea, he would have congratulated the Thessalonians, not refuted their errant belief. Despite the incessant and tiring repetition of the steady flow of date-setters, on the opposite side of the question, Scripture does not specifically reveal the time when the Lord shall return and end this world in righteous judgment. In fact, in 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul associates the precise date to the unknown time when a burglar might break into your home and steal your property, not the words of a man who supposedly believed that he knew the time.

Despite the steady historical flow of date-setters, Scripture does not specifically reveal the time when the Lord shall return and end this world in righteous judgment. Understandably, each generation of believers who embrace Scripture's teaching regarding the Lord's promised and certain return rightly long for His coming and would love to be alive when He returns. Longing for the day and believing in its certainty is altogether Biblical. Morphing that idea into a date-stamped prediction is not Biblical. The Biblical effect to be cultivated based on our longing hope is a transformed life, not a ticking alarm clock with a known time set for the bell to ring.

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:3) This passage, though not addressed to the Thessalonians, confronts the heart of their problem. Instead of living in active faith and godly service to the Lord and to His people, the Thessalonians likely had withdrawn from all active service into a passive waiting mode. If the Lord's return is certain and within our lifetime, why not just stop preparing for

the future, either for our family or the faith, and just wait for the trumpet to blow.

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him.... In our present study passage, Paul sets the tone for a righteous, balanced, and faithful life that ever looks and longs for the Lord's coming, Paul raises two specific reasons for his admonition; 1) the certainty of the Lord's return, His coming, and 2) the equal certainty of our gathering together unto Him when He returns. If these two facts are acknowledged in our faith, and if we deal with them rightly, Biblically, we shall avoid date-setting and all the disruptive and neglectful conduct associated with such errors.

A casual believer might minimize such errant beliefs and question, "So what is so wrong about having a different belief regarding the Second Coming? No one knows all the details about it, so just let each believer think whatever he wants about it. When it really happens, all the errors about it will be corrected anyway." Paul's point answers the naïve question. False belief always imposes its effects onto people, highly destructive effects at that. Consider the passage. According to Paul, failure to grasp and hold to the truth regarding the Lord's return leads directly to people being "...soon shaken in mind" and "...troubled." Whenever a believer in Christ forsakes a right view of Scripture in favor of his own "private interpretation," (2 Peter 1:20) bad things always accompany error. Scripture is true and only true. However, our interpretation of Scripture is not so infallible. We have rejected the Roman Catholic error of "Ex Cathedra," the Roman belief that the Pope, when officially speaking from his seat as head of the Roman Church, is infallible in his utterances. Why then would we embrace the equal notion that we, any of us, are just as infallible when we develop our private interpretation of a Scripture? The whole idea of personal interpretational infallibility ignores and contradicts the Bible teaching that the Lord's church is "...the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15) Scripture never permits an individual believer to create his own private interpretation of Scripture and then try to impose it onto other believers. At its

heart, this errant and prideful idea contradicts the supremacy of Scripture and its teachings regarding both itself and the Lord's church. If believers are capable of arriving at total and infallible truth on their own, why did the Lord send preachers of the gospel to "...perfect the saints"? (Ephesians 4:12-16; in this comprehensive list of objectives for the spiritual gifts the Lord has given in the preaching of the gospel, we do not see either the mention or hint of the idea that some saints actually arrive at perfect knowledge or understanding and therefore no longer need the instruction and "Perfecting" of the gospel to their minds and conduct) If it is possible for a believer in this life to arrive at perfect knowledge, the gospel ceases at that point to have a valid purpose. The language in this passage utterly refutes the idea that any believer, however studious, conscientious, or intelligent, is capable of arriving at full and infallible understanding of the truth of the gospel. If this idea were valid, we should congratulate the Roman Church for its idea rather than rejecting their "Ex Cathedra" notion. Sadly, observation consistently reveals that folks who hold to this idea of perfect and infallible knowledge typically claim it for themselves, but they fiercely reject it as a realistic state in any other believer, especially in a believer who challenges their personal and private interpretations. Reality check. If the Holy Spirit refused to allow the men whom He chose to write His Bible for His people to include their private interpretations in its contents, we may rest assured that He even more forcefully will not smile on any believer who pretends to have arrived at inspired truth in toto and thinks that he so perfectly knows it and understands it all.

...neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us. Error must find footing in apparent truth to gain any footing in our minds. Whether in vain date setting or in vain pretense of perfect and infallible knowledge of Scripture, error always clothes itself with the appearance of a convincing and credible uniform. Paul opens the door widely. It matters not what the basis on which the Thessalonians thought to be right and rightly informed, they were wrong at the foundation. No spirit or attitude that came from God, no word that claimed or appeared to come from God, and no writing, even writings that falsely claimed to be from Paul gave the Thessalonians any sound and true basis for their false belief. The error resided in their minds, as all error resides. The deceived mind will fabricate some basis of support that appears credible, but error always builds on the pretense of truth and validity. According to Paul, nothing of any sort should ever be accepted that seeks to supplant, correct, or contradict or replace Scripture's revelation.

Whether we deal with the Second Coming or with any other Bible truth, error always carries a heavy load of destructive baggage and bad consequences with it. If an errant belief regarding the Lord's certain return caused those who held the idea to be soon troubled and shaken in their minds,

we should avoid error, not pretend that it has no consequences and therefore choose to ignore it.

...as that the day of Christ is at hand. Paul will go into more details than we can grasp regarding the certainty of the Lord's return, as well as documenting certain events that must occur prior to that event, things that had not yet occurred at his writing to the Thessalonians, and apparently things that he understood would not occur anytime soon. For Paul, the Lord's return was a certain future event, but not an immediate event that he expected soon as the Thessalonians errantly believed. For Paul and for us, His "day," the time of His return in glory and our resurrection, is certain, but not immediate. Not knowing the precise date of the Lord's return should be viewed as an incentive for believers to be faithful and steadfast, always ready for our Lord's return, whether it comes in our lifetime or centuries in the future.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. "...by any means," Satan pulls out the stops and exploits any available tool to poison a believer's mind with toxic idea that lead the believer away from the fellowship of the saints and into an isolated state where he becomes an easy target for the planted error to flourish in his mind. One soldier alone is always an easier target than a well-armed and alert army. The more Satan can convince an individual believer that he is right and any who disagree with him are wrong the more effectively the adversary can neutralize the lone believer.

For the Thessalonians, the idea that the Second Coming might occur immediately ignored Scripture's teaching regarding certain future events that simply had not yet occurred in their lifetime. They conveniently (For their embraced error) chose to ignore any Scripture that didn't harmonize with their idea, likely merely twisting such passages to say what they wanted it to say, not what the Lord poured into its intended meaning. Most often error will make a very loud pretense of claiming support from Scripture, but the error slips out of the shadows and appears as the error that it is when Scriptures are rightly interpreted, not twisted by private interpretations. We must allow Scripture to speak, not force our own ideas into Scripture. In the case of the Thessalonians, there was almost certainly one or more men who twisted Paul's or other inspired writings to mean something wholly different than the Holy Spirit intended by them. Paul's warning confronts that issue. "Let no man deceive you by any means...." Respect for Scripture follows its teachings in context and interpreted by Scripture. Failure to respect Scripture pours private interpretations into Scripture and pretends that it teaches the private interpretation, not its contextual and Holy Spirit-intended truth. Rest your faith in the God who has declared that He shall return, not in false teachers who claim to know the date.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor