*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 31 – February 5

Letters of Paul

**Monday, January 31 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4**

“To the church in Thessalonica”

In contrast to 1 Thessalonians, we know next to nothing about the specific circumstances that led to the writing of 2 Thessalonians. That it was sent by the same three people as 1 Thessalonians and reflects so closely its language and structure suggests that it was written not long after the first letter. We do not know how Paul became informed of the new developments in Thessalonica; one possibility is that someone from the church traveled to visit Paul and shared with him the latest news, including questions and concerns, of the Thessalonian church.

The Thessalonians’ faith is growing more and more, and the love they have for each other is increasing – the very thing for which Paul said he was praying in 1 Thessalonians 3:10, 12. Paul expresses his gratitude to God for the divinely inspired growth experienced by the Thessalonians. Their growth in faith and love was taking place under the most adverse conditions: the continuing experience of persecution. The church’s circumstances do not appear to have changed much since the time of Paul’s writing the first letter.

*May our faith flourish and our love for one another grow in you, Lord. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 1 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10**

“God will provide rest”

The Thessalonians, having placed their faith in God, are being attacked by forces hostile to God. The fact that the Thessalonians are not only persevering and trusting in the midst of persecution, but actually growing in faith and increasing in love, is a sign of God’s blessing. In other words, the growth, increase, perseverance, and trust demonstrated by the Thessalonians give evidence that they are indeed part of God’s people. Enduring persecution and afflictions are not evidence to the contrary, but in fact confirmatory evidence that they belong to God.

Paul develops the idea of God’s righteous judgment. There are, he says, two sides to this judgment, one negative (v. 6, retribution to those who trouble God’s people) and one positive (v. 7, relief to those who are troubled). The negative side is discussed further in vv. 8-9. The positive side receives further definition in v. 10. In sharpest contrast to those who disobey the gospel, those who have believed will experience both the presence and the glory of the Lord himself (the very things the other group will not experience).

*When Christ returns, Lord, we will rest in you forever. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 2 Romans 1:18-32**

[A follow-up on verse 6 from yesterday’s devotion]

Some modern translations use the term “anger” instead of “wrath.” But “wrath,” while a bit old-fashioned, preserves the more objective sense of the word when applied to God. God’s reaction to sin is not the “anger” of an emotional person; it is the necessary response of a holy God to sin. In this passage, Paul repeats a sequence three times: “they exchanged . . .” – “therefore God gave them over . . .” In each case, human beings exchanged their own “god” or sin for the truth of God. One aspect of God’s righteous judgment against sin is to give them over to the consequences of the choice they have made.

Turning away from true knowledge of God means cutting ourselves off from any ultimately accurate understanding of this world and our place within it. No wonder that people do not understand the moral stances that Christians take on the basis of God’s truth. Another result is not surprising either: People end up doing what ought not to be done. In verses 29-31, Paul provides several illustrations of this sinful conduct.

*My sin deserves your wrath, Lord, but in Christ I am forgiven. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 31 – February 5

Letters of Paul

**Thursday, February 3 Romans 8:15-17**

[A follow-up on verse 7 from Tuesday’s devotion]

God has made us his children through the work of his Spirit. As a result, we rejoice now in being able to call God “Father.” But we also rejoice in knowing that God, having adopted us, has also made us his heirs. We can therefore look forward to the future with confidence. Paul uses the image of the Greco-Roman practice whereby a man could formally confer on a child all the legal rights of a birth child. This, Paul suggests, is what God’s Spirit confers on every believer – the rights and privileges of God’s own children.

But precisely because the adopted child is an heir, there is still something incomplete in his status. Though legally part of a new family, adopted children do not yet possess all the benefits of their new situation. Thus, Paul reminds us, we Christians must still await the consummation of that new status. One day we will enter into the inheritance (i.e., resurrection), following the Son who has gone ahead of us. We will share in his own glorious state. In the meantime, however, we must follow him in the road he himself walked on the way to glory – the road of suffering.

*In you I am secure, Lord, for I am your child. Amen.*

**Friday, February 4 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12**

“We keep on praying for you”

In these verses Paul reprises some of the key themes of vv. 5-10 in a prayer report. His first petition (which resumes the idea of v. 5) is that God will make them worthy of his call. His other petition is that God might fulfill or bring to completion all that their faith prompts them to do (resuming the idea of v. 10). The emphasis on God’s power reinforces the thought that God through the Holy Spirit is at work in the Thessalonians’ midst.

When God’s people live in a manner worthy of their calling, one consequence is that the name of our Lord Jesus is presently honored. The honoring of the Lord and his name in turn results in the honoring of his followers by God, a process that begins with the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers now and culminates with the revealing of the glorious resurrection of the children of God at Christ’s return. All of this is due solely to the grace of God. While grace brought about our initial salvation, we must not overlook the fact that the present and future realities of our life in God are no less a matter of grace.

*May the manner of my life, Lord, bring honor to you. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 5 Ephesians 4:1-3**

[A follow-up on verse 11 from yesterday’s devotion]

Paul describes a life worthy of God’s calling as being marked by humility, gentleness, patience, tolerant love, and peacekeeping. Attention first to the ego and then to loving relations. An understanding of God’s work is always an attack on the ego, not to obliterate or humiliate the self, but to bring it into relation with God and to redirect its interests. In losing life we find it.

Humility means “lowliness of mind” as opposed to haughtiness, and is expressed by thinking more highly of others than of oneself. Gentleness means strength under pressure. When we feel tempted to lash out, take revenge, speak mockingly, and so forth when provoked, gentleness is the strength to resist the temptation. Patience is the exercise of a largeness of soul that can endure annoyances and difficulties over a period of time. Tolerant love which makes allowance for another’s faults is an act of the will and it is always costly. The bond of peace can mean either “the bond that is peace” or “the bond that peace creates.” In either case, the unity we share in God’s Spirit is based on the peacemaking act of Christ on the cross.

*I value your love more than anything, Lord, and I desire to be shaped by it. Amen.*