2 Thessalonians - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

Holiness and the Second Coming of Christ, Holiness and the Second Coming of Christ: No. 4

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We will now look at the Second Epistle to the assembly of the Thessalonians in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ. These young believers had evidently been alarmed by the crafty ministers of Satan taking advantage of the persecutions through which they were passing, to represent to them that the day of the Lord was come; and even so early, to pretend that they had apostolic authority for the alarm. (See chap, ii. 1, 2.) We often forget the power that Satan began to wield by this very pretension, and has continued to use against the true saints of God ever since. Oh, how the servant of Christ had to denounce them: " For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light " &c. (2 Cor. 6:13-15.) And in this Epistle he says, " For the mystery of iniquity doth already work." (2 Thess. 2:7.) Pretension then to apostolic authority is a sure mark of the mystery of iniquity.

Satan is always defeated in the end, and this attempt of his ministers is the occasion of the Spirit bringing out the fact of our being first gathered up to meet the Lord. " Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our being gathered together unto him." Nothing need shake them, or alarm them, as to the terrible day of the Lord; for they must first be with the Lord, as he had taught them in the First Epistle.

And more, when that terrible day should come, they would be in perfect rest. u And to you who are troubled, rest with us; when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power." (2 Thess. 1:7-9.) Remember also those words, "And they shall not escape." No, if not saved now, there is no escape then. And all this surely coming at the very time men shall be saying, Peace and safety.

No escape, and the punishment, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. They have refused the glad tidings of His grace in forgiveness of sins, and now there is no more forgiveness. Forever, driven from His presence, in everlasting woe. This, however, is not, and cannot be, the portion of His holy ones. " When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." What a contrast! Yes, He will be glorified in all His saints. Oh, that dying thief, sinner up to the hour of his death! Not one day's good works to present. Shall not our Jesus be glorified in him? In like manner will He be glorified in every sinner redeemed by His precious blood. " And be admired in all them that believe." Where will the despiser of His sovereign grace be then? Yes, the myriads of His saints, all those that believed, will be manifested with Him in glory. The crushed, the hated, the persecuted, those who have suffered cruel deaths at the hands of wicked, proud Pharisees, all, all believers will come with Him in glory. Glorious day for them; terrible day for all who have rejected the glad tidings of eternal redemption through His blood.

But what has all this to do with present holiness and practical righteousness? " Wherefore/' the apostle says on that very account, " also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power." Oh, wondrous calling, to come with Jesus in glory; but what is the distinct object of this prayer? "That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." This holiness is a very different affair from self-righteous perfection in the flesh.

If we are not waiting for the Lord from heaven, how can there be " the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified”? And is it not the free favor, the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ, that sets before us this blessed hope? What motives for holiness, for entire separation from the world about to be judged by the personal coming of Christ in flaming fire! What effect would this have upon you, reader, if you were really expecting this terrible and near event? And what effect if you were expecting your Lord this day? How different everything would look!

Chapter ii. If we carefully read this chapter, describing, as it does, the terrible increase of wickedness, lawlessness of man, until headed up in the wicked one, and his destruction by the coming of Christ, we see the awful contrast between those who have rejected the truth and those chosen of God from the beginning to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. One company in that day believe a lie, that they all might be damned, or condemned, everlastingly lost; the other have the sure prospect of obtaining the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. What then is the effect as to practical holiness? "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle." They were thus exhorted to hold fast the entire teaching of the apostle.

One word as to tradition. The scriptures were not yet completed. Perhaps these two letters to the Thessalonians were the only Epistles of the New Testament as yet written, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And mark, these young converts had only had three weeks' instruction from the apostle. (Acts 17) Further, by reading these two epistles, so full in every chapter of the blessed hope of the second coming of Christ, we may judge with certainty what was the character of his oral teaching or traditions. He says, " Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" (Chap. ii. 5.) Now because they were to hold fast the inspired teaching of the apostle, whose whole soul was yearning and waiting for his Lord from heaven, and who had no other hope, is this any reason why we should receive and hold fast the traditions of an apostate Christendom which has entirely lost the hope of the Lord's return—nay, traditions in flat contradiction of the inspired scriptures?

If our hearts are waiting for the Lord from heaven, we shall gladly hold fast all that is in strict keeping with the word of God. And may He enable us, at whatever cost, to reject whatever is not in accordance with His word.

" Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.” Thus the effect of the free favor of our God and Father in giving us such a blessed hope, is not only to separate us from this evil world, but to comfort our hearts, and to stablish us in true holiness in every good word and work. And again, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ," or, the patience of Christ. As He dwells in the unchanging love of God, patiently waiting until we are caught up to meet Him, so we, abiding in the same love, arc waiting in patience to see His face. Jesus waits the Father's bidding, we wait His call.

How very close, then, is the connection betwixt true practical holiness, and waiting in patience for the Lord Jesus from heaven! If this is not the ease, we are sure to become earthly minded. " And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom, go ye out to meet him.” What was the effect of this cry? " Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps." Immediately it is the question of oil. Have you got the Holy Spirit? All practical holiness is by the Spirit of God dwelling in us. And the presentation of the Person of the Bridegroom awakes the most searching inquiry. Are we ready to go to meet Him? Is there a single thing we are doing that we should be ashamed of if we met the glorious Bridegroom this day? Surely there is no time to delay. The inquiry is imperative. Have you got oil in your lamps? Are you quite ready to meet your Lord and Bridegroom?

Remember, all ye mere professors, “And the door was shut.” In vain the cry then, " Lord, Lord, open unto us." Will you ever hear Him say, " I know you not"? It is Jesus Himself who says, " Watch, therefore." It will, no doubt, be true to the remnant of Israel; is it not also true at this moment, in the midst of all the sports and pastimes of the professing church? Jesus says to us, " Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. “To the Jews in their tribulation, there will be distinct signs, that the coming of the Lord is at hand. To us there are no such signs; Jesus counts on us waiting for Him, to take us to Himself. (Compare Matt. 24:15-30 with John 14:1, 2.)

He speaks to our hearts, " Surely I come quickly.”

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