

June 18 2 Thessalonians (50% disputed)

Intro

It's uncertain as to whether or not Paul actually wrote 2 Thessalonians. The strongest support for his authorship are the similarities in structure to the first letter: simple headings, repeated thanksgivings, and prayers following thanksgiving. Furthermore, both letters stress a belief in the imminent nature of the end time. However, some scholars question why Paul would imitate his first letter so closely? Is this too good a copy? Too good an impersonation? Furthermore, in the first letter the end time orientation is the grounds for their hope, whereas in the second letter the orthodox (officially authorized) body of knowledge about the faith is the grounds for hope. The tone in this letter is radically different. In the first letter, Paul writes that destruction will come upon unbelievers, in this letter the author seems to relish such tragedy. In the first letter, Paul says that idlers should be admonished, in this letter they are to be denied food. In the first letter, it says that everyone in the church should come together to hear what Paul wrote to them, in this letter it says everyone must obey what it says or else be shunned. Finally, this letter seems to try too hard to authenticate itself as genuine –an effort that would not be necessary if Paul were still alive at the time of the writing. It is unclear when it was written.

Chapter 1

This passage focusses primarily on encouraging the church who has been so persecuted during this time. “Paul” begins the letter by giving thanks to God for the fact that the church's love is increasing, and for their faithfulness in times of trial, which is evidence of God's righteousness at work within them. However, then it shifts to a darker tone as the author begins relishing the eternal destruction of those who have persecuted the church. This is meant as an encouragement –that vindication is surely coming!

Chapter 2

There have apparently been rumors circulating around the church that the day of the Lord has already come (and they've missed it). The sole purpose for writing this letter is to refute these harmful rumors. The author tries to lay out an orderly (though mysterious) account of the second coming of Christ: the forces that rebel against God gain power and rebellion breaks out, and the lawless one (could be the antichrist spoken of in Revelation and John's letters) is revealed and exalts himself above everything and blasphemes by naming himself as God. The letter indicates that there is some mysterious force holding back the lawless one until the appointed time for the end comes, at which point Christ will annihilate him in one breath, for our God is so much more powerful than the forces that rebel against God.

Chapter 3

The author asks the church to pray for its leaders and evangelists so that the church will continue to grow and bring glory to God. Though there is plenty to be afraid of (and persecutions abound), the author has a firm resolve because God is faithful and will provide what is truly needful, and that is more important than anything any one person can do. Paul then shifts to discussing the problem of idleness within the church. It was common in the early church for Christians to pool resources together and to eat together. However, it seems that either some are so expectant for Jesus to return at any moment that they've quit their jobs, or that those who are wealthy are not working but just spending their days as idle busybodies, which is not a spiritually healthy way to live. The author does not say "those who can't work, shouldn't eat", but rather "those unwilling to work, shouldn't eat."