

# **Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature,**

## **Lecture 24, Philemon and Thessalonians**

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in New Testament History and Literature, lecture 24 on Philemon and Thessalonians.

All right, let's go ahead and get started, and let's open with prayer.

Father, we thank you again for loving us and for calling us to be your people. And I pray that we'll come to a greater understanding of what that means and how to respond to that reality, having looked to more depth in the documents that communicate and embody that calling and that identity of who we are as your people. So, we pray for your presence and your enablement as we continue to think about analyze, and study the New Testament for the purpose of becoming the people that you desire us to be. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.

All right, in the last class period we finished up the book of Colossians and Philemon, two books that we kind of departed from the canonical order of the New Testament text and treated them together for obvious reasons. But one of the issues that particularly the book of Philemon raises, but is raised in a few sections of the New Testament, is related to the main topic of the book of Philemon.

And that is, why does Paul not come right out and condemn slavery outright? Instead, when you look at, for example, if you look at the book of Colossians, Paul does address the issue of slavery, but he always does so in terms of how it is to be regulated, how slaves are, how masters are to respond to their slaves and vice versa. But Paul never comes right out and condemns slavery says it's wrong or calls on masters to release their slaves. And so that has often raised the question, why does Paul not do that? Why does he choose to regulate slavery rather than come right out and condemn it or speak out against it? Why didn't he just come out and tell Philemon and all other slave owners, especially Christian slave owners, to release their slaves? Now, again, I don't know if I can or if I want to try to provide an answer to that question.

I don't think the answer comes easily to that question. But instead, I want to just provide a number of parameters or a number of things to think about in addressing or thinking about that question. And the first one has to do with how we understand slavery in the Greco-Roman world.

The first thing you need to realize is that, unlike our posts, at least in the United States, in a North American context, our experience of slavery is usually post-Civil

War, and where we think of slavery as something that is racially motivated. However, that was not the case in the first century. Slavery was not a racial issue.

One did not become a slave because of one's race or anything like that. Usually, you became a slave because you were part of a nation or territory that had been conquered and you became the slaves of the conquering nation, or you would become a slave because you had to sell yourself into slavery for financial means. So, it had nothing to do with racial motivation.

The second thing to realize, too, is that at least in the first century, slavery ran the gamut between slaves that operated in very cruel conditions, such as those that were conscripted for service in mines, working in the mines in Rome, on one end, which, again, they were treated very cruelly in very poor circumstances, whereas on the other end, you had some slaves that worked for wealthy masters that were treated very well and in some senses were better off than they were before they were slaves, especially if they were in extreme poverty or something like that. They might now be working for a master and they may have better food and better lodging and oftentimes a means of achieving their own freedom. So even the circumstances in the Greco-Roman Empire for slavery were very different than what we think of often today.

The third thing in relationship to slavery in the Greco-Roman world is that due to the ubiquitous nature of slavery, the fact that it was all over the place, it's almost as if the stability, in one sense, the stability in the economy of the Roman government depended on it, that I wonder if Paul thought that it would have been futile and perhaps more damaging to Christianity to try to speak out against it. In fact, it's interesting, that Paul apparently has no precedence for speaking out against slavery. When you look at other Jewish writings, etc., Paul would have really been a maverick in trying to tackle the problem, the issue of slavery in the Roman Empire due to its nature and the fact that it was so ingrained and widespread.

And again, it's possible that had he tried to do so and had Christians tried to undo the problem of slavery, it's possible that that could have, again, caused more harm and even threatened the existence of Christianity, at least some have speculated. So, the first thing that's important to realize is that slavery in the Greco-Roman world was very different from sometimes what we think of or what we've perhaps experienced, those of you who are from different cultures or countries, where slavery is a part of life. But in the United States, we often think of slavery, again, in terms of post-Civil War, where it was in some ways a very different experience.

So, the first thing is to realize those three things. Slavery was not racially motivated. One became a slave by various means unrelated to one's, generally unrelated to one's background or one's nationality.

And then second, the fact that slavery was not always cruel or inhumane, but sometimes one's status as a slave, if one was a slave, one found him or herself in a better situation than prior to being a slave. And then third, just the fact that it was so ingrained in Greco-Roman culture that perhaps, again, perhaps Paul saw or thought it would have been counterproductive to try to undermine and speak out against it. Instead, I wonder if perhaps Paul decided to take another tact, and that he thought the very gospel that, and this seems to be what underlies his argument in Philemon, the very gospel that proclaims an equal share in the person of Jesus Christ, or an equal inheritance or equal sharing in the gospel.

That, and remember back in Galatians, Paul said, in Christ, there is no male or female, no slave nor free. So, I wonder if Paul perhaps thought that the preaching of the gospel itself would have, at least with Christians, would eventually be the undoing and the unraveling of slavery. It was the former New Testament scholar, F.F. Bruce, who for a long time taught in British universities.

F.F. Bruce said something along the lines that he thought Paul would have been convinced that through the gospel, the preaching of the gospel emphasizes one's unity in Christ and emphasizes equality in Christ that transcends social distinctions. Bruce said that that gospel would have created an environment where slavery could only wilt and die eventually. And he may have a point.

So perhaps Paul thought that the preaching of the gospel would itself be the eventual undoing of slavery. At other times, Paul was willing to speak directly to certain issues, but perhaps these number of comments I've made is at least the start of addressing why perhaps Paul did not speak explicitly out against slavery or condemn it outright. Yep.

If he had complete freedom? In other words, if he could have gotten away with it without any... Yeah, I would guess in our society he probably would. I'm just guessing that maybe in our society where he may have had more freedom of speech in this regard and perhaps not some of the entanglements he might have had politically, he may have spoken more outright against it, for example, today. Yeah, it appears.

Again, the way he addresses... I'm convinced by what he's doing in Philemon and just, again, his emphasis on, especially in a book like Galatians, in Christ there's neither slave nor free. And the idea that he seems to emphasize throughout the New Testament that social classes don't matter in Christ and should not be a cause of division within the church, this is one area he would have spoken out against. And again, I think he's doing so implicitly in a book like Philemon.

That's a very good question. I think there's a lot more work to do, and I'm not an expert at all in Paul's thought on slavery, but there's probably a lot of work to do in that area. That's a very good question.

Good. Well, let's move on and open another piece of the early church's mail. And so, we'll reach into the mailbox and pull out a letter.

Or actually two letters that are addressed to a church in Thessalonica or Thessalonica. I talked to one person from Greece that says, no, it's Thessaloniki. So, whatever you want to call it.

I kind of call it Thessalonica. I don't know why, but there's a variety of ways to pronounce it. But we'll talk about two letters, letter number one and letter number two that Paul addressed to the church at Thessalonica.

We'll have to ask again, why two letters? Again, we looked at 1 and 2 Corinthians and saw that those two letters were actually just part of Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian church. We know of at least four letters that Paul wrote to Corinth, two of which have survived in what we call 1 and 2 Corinthians. So now we have two letters addressed to the church in Thessalonica.

So, we will have to ask, why two letters? What situation occasions the writing of these letters? So, first of all, letter number one. Why did Paul write this letter that we call the first letter to the Thessalonians? As you can see, you've seen a map similar to this before, but this is a map and you can find all kinds of variations, but this was nice and colorful and uncluttered. So, I decided to put it up.

This is obviously modern-day Greece and modern-day Turkey or ancient Asia Minor. And these different colored lines simply represent Paul's missionary journeys from the book of Acts. We looked at the three primary missionary journeys, his last, the red line demonstrates or represents Paul's last journey to Rome ends the book of Acts in chapter 28.

But you'll notice that up here is Thessalonica. It is that Paul, especially in Acts chapter 17. So, the primary background we have for the book of 1 Thessalonians is Acts chapter 17, where Paul spent only a few months in Thessalonica.

He actually left under rather hostile circumstances. His reception in Thessalonica was not overwhelming by everyone. So, he was only there for a few months in Thessalonica, which if you remember in the ancient world, Greece was divided up into two empires, Macedonia in the north and Achaia in the south.

Thessalonica was in the northern part of Macedonia, the northern part of the modern-day Greek empire. And down here is Corinth. We talked a little bit about Corinth being in Achaia, the southern part, but there is Thessalonica.

Paul visited that in one of his missionary journeys which we find recorded in Acts chapter 17. And so, after a few months there, Paul had actually established a church. And then he hears news about the church in Thessalonica about a couple of issues that he needs to address.

So that's basically why 1 Thessalonians is written. Much like 1 Corinthians, Paul gets wind of a couple of problems. Apparently, the problems were a little more serious in Corinth and there were more of them, but still, there were a couple of issues that Paul felt necessary to sit down and sort out and address the Thessalonians about.

Now what were those issues? Actually, here, these are a couple of, this is the modern-day city of Thessalonica. Paul stayed on this upper floor when he was in Thessalonica. Some of the ancient ruins of first-century Thessalonica.

Another picture. Interestingly, you'll notice the contrast between some of the archaeological work that had been done in the ancient city and the modern structure right behind it. I found that these aren't pictures I've taken.

They were handed on to me. But kind of an interesting contrast between the ancient city or the remains and then the modern structure that has been built. The letter actually divides quite simply into two parts.

The first three chapters may tell us something about Paul's relationship with the Thessalonian church and the nature of the problems. Again, they don't appear, at least in comparison with some of his other letters, to be quite as severe or to have Paul quite as upset. But in the first three chapters, Paul basically praises the readers because the news that he's heard about their progress in the gospel has been nothing but good.

Following a common convention in some letters, Paul is basically getting his readers on his side so that when he does have specific instructions for them, hopefully, they'll be more likely to be receptive towards them and follow through. So, the first three chapters are kind of one long thanksgiving. Remember, most of Paul's letters begin with a thanksgiving.

In a sense, the thanksgiving is extended throughout the first three chapters as Paul praises the readers because of the progress they've made in the gospel that he first preached to them back in Acts chapter 17. But again, in chapters 4 and 5, Paul does have further instructions for them. And the two issues that he addresses, one of them is sexual purity.

Again, if you remember, in most of the Greco-Roman cities, sexual immorality or looser morals would have been the standard of the day, often in connection with certain religious observations and certain worship in temples among the Greco-

Roman gods. But even more generally beyond that, so it's possible that some of the Thessalonians who had been converted under Paul's ministry to Christianity may still have found it tempting to go back to their formal lifestyle. So, Paul, much as he did in 1 Corinthians, now instructs the Corinthians in regard to sexual purity, which he places in the category of their sanctification and their holiness.

So, according to Paul, holiness and sanctification knew no boundaries. It encompassed all of one's life. But another issue that Paul deals with is the second coming of Christ.

This would be the not-yet. Remember, we've talked about the already but not-yet eschatological tension, the fact that the future has already arrived. For example, in Jesus' teaching in the kingdom, the kingdom was already present, yet it had not yet arrived in its fullness.

Now Paul addresses the not yet, that is, he talks about the second coming of Christ at the end of history to bring salvation and judgment. And one thing interesting is when you read, almost to anticipate this, when you read 1 Corinthians, you'll note that at the end of each chapter, there is a key reference to the coming of Christ, to the future coming of Christ. And then when you get to chapter 4, Paul finally addresses that in more detail.

Now in chapter 4, this is what Paul says. And you see, at least I can't remember the last time I've ever heard this text preached on except at a funeral. So, it's likely that this is where you've heard this text.

But he begins by, I'm down, starting with verse 13 of chapter 4. But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died so that you may not grieve as others who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this, we declare to you by the word of the Lord.

I want to go back to that phrase, by the word of the Lord. What is that? That we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with the cry of command, and with the shout of an archangel, and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

And verse 18 is the key. This is meant, obviously, to encourage these beleaguered Thessalonians because of what something they've experienced. We'll talk about what

may have been the problem Paul was addressing that called for this kind of lengthy section treating the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the return of Christ to earth and gathering everyone to meet him in the air.

What is that referring to and why did Paul have to talk about that? But first of all, let me just say one thing to kind of get out of the way. One of the things that have interested most people is how 1 Thessalonians fits within the Bible's overall teaching about eschatology and end-time stuff? And one of my hobbies is whenever I go to churches, I like to read their doctrinal statements. And you think, what kind of freak is that? Since I don't read doctrinal statements at churches, but that's what I like to do.

Mainly, I just like to see what they include and how specific they like to get and what kinds of things they exclude, what kinds of things they include. A doctrinal statement simply is the statement of what is distinctive about what this church believes as far as what they think the Bible teaches. What kind of identifies those who belong to this church as far as their system of beliefs related to who God is, who Jesus Christ is, what they think about the Bible, what they think about the Holy Spirit, what they think about the church.

And there's usually some kind of a statement about what they think about the future. And so, there's interest in what 1 Thessalonians 4 says about the future. And that is, how is God going to bring this world to an end? And a number of churches like to construct rather elaborate schemes where a lot of the details fit.

Can we form a kind of detailed timeline or at least a general timeline that describes how things will unfold when Jesus Christ returns? Now, interestingly, when you go all the way back to the early creeds like we cite the Apostles' Creed once in a while or read some of the early creeds, the Nicene Creed, and again on through history to our modern-day doctrinal statements, the church has always believed that Jesus is going to come back and bring history to a conclusion and then inaugurate a new heavens and new earth, which we'll talk about later in Revelation. But churches differ on how we fill in the details around that very general scheme. Now, generally, in Jewish eschatology, going back to the Old Testament and also some of the Jewish literature written leading up to and during the time of the New Testament, one way to characterize Jewish eschatology, is their understanding of the end of history and the return of God to vindicate God's people, to set things right, to renew the earth and to restore and establish his kingdom.

That is the not yet part of things. Jewish eschatology would have understood that they were living in the present age generally, an age dominated by evil and sin. Although God was still active, it was an age where, again, Satan was the ruler of this world and evil still held sway.

But one day, one day God would intervene and the age to come or the new age would arrive. By this, I don't mean the new age movement. I mean the new age referring to God's promise of salvation, the kingdom of God that Jesus promised, the not yet part of it, the new creation that God would one day inaugurate would take place when God returns and restores all things and judges the earth but vindicates and rewards his faithful people.

Now, leading up to that time, a lot of Jewish literature also envisioned what is often called eschatological woes or birth pangs. They often compared, in other words, a period of intense suffering that would precede the coming of God's arrival to renew all things, establish a new creation and set up his kingdom. That period in the future would be preceded by a period of these eschatological woes or some have called them birth pangs.

In the same way that a woman knows she's going to give birth as the pains intensify, as a prelude to giving birth, that's how the Jews understood these woes or this tribulation that would take place. It would kind of be a prelude to and inaugurate the coming of, again, the visitation of God to establish his kingdom and to renew all things and establish a new creation. So that kind of sets the backdrop for what we find in books like 1 Thessalonians and the book of Revelation.

The question is, where does 1 Thessalonians and this teaching, this idea of being raised to meet Christ in the air and the idea of being caught up to meet him and being with him forever and meeting him in the clouds, where does all that fit into this understanding of this future time, this not yet when Christ will come and set up his kingdom and inaugurate a new creation and rule all things to judge the world but to vindicate and reward those who have remained faithful? Where does 1 Thessalonians fall into that? Now, the main thing that people are interested in, and I hesitate to bring this up because I don't think it's personally a big issue, but so many Christians still get exercised over this, and that is most of it has to do with this period here, the eschatological woes or period of tribulation. And so, in 1 Thessalonians 4, we read this phrase in verse 17, we who are alive who are left will be caught up in the clouds. That phrase caught up is translated with Latin, in the Latin version of the Bible is translated with a Latin word from which we get the word rapture.

And so interestingly, in a number of church doctrinal statements, you'll find them talking about the rapture of the saints. That is a time when we get caught up to meet the Lord in the air, which is what we find in 1 Thessalonians 4. The question is, when does it happen in this scheme? When does this being caught up to meet the Lord in the air take place? And the problem is 1 Thessalonians 4 doesn't tell us everything there is to know about eschatology because again, Paul's main concern is only to say enough in verse 18 so that they can comfort each other with these words to address the problem he's addressing. So, we can't expect Paul to say everything there is to say about eschatology or about the not yet, about the second coming of Christ.



But when does this being caught up occur? So, you may have heard of this language, the tribulation, this stands for the eschatological woes. In the last chart, the Jewish idea of eschatological woes or birth pangs or sufferings and tribulation and distress that will immediately precede the second coming of Christ. The key is, when does this being caught up that we call the rapture, when does this take place in relationship to these messianic or eschatological woes or this tribulation, these birth pangs? If you read church doctrinal statements, you probably won't find these two as much, but you'll often find this one.

And that is the view known as pre-tribulation says, this being caught up to meet the Lord in the air in 1 Thessalonians 4 happens before or pre those eschatological woes that we know as the great, that Paul or other, not Paul, but other authors call the great tribulation or again, the Jewish literature called it the eschatological woes or the birth pangs. So, pre-tribulation says Jesus will catch us up in 1 Thessalonians 4. Jesus catches us up before that ever takes place. Another view, there's actually a number of views.

I'm being really kind of simplistic and just touching on dominant views in church history. Another view that isn't, I don't hear it argued for anymore. There's kind of a version of it, but you don't hear this one.

That's mid-trib rapture. I guess they couldn't make up their minds. So, they said it was kind of in-between.

That's not why. But that is sometime in the middle of these eschatological woes, this time of tribulation that in the preceding slide comes right before the coming of Christ, that in the middle of that before it really gets bad and gets going is the church will be caught up. So, when Paul says we'll be caught up in verse 18 to meet the Lord in the air, he's referring to some time in the middle of these eschatological woes, this period of tribulation and distress.

Finally, is what is known as the post-tribulation rapture. That is being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, the so-called rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4 comes post or after these woes or the period of tribulation. So, this rapture, the so-called rapture, and the second coming of Jesus are the same event.

These other two views say the rapture, this being caught up in 1 Thessalonians 4 and the second coming of Christ to set up his kingdom and to the new creation and to renew all things are two different events. This one says no, they're the same thing. When Jesus comes back to catch us up to be with him, that's when he'll bring history to an end and establish his kingdom.

So, the idea is that God's people will experience these eschatological woes, these birth pangs, this tribulation. But at the end of that time, at the end of history, God will come and gather his people to himself and then recreate the entire world, judge the world, reward his faithful people, and set up his kingdom that will last forever. So, if you hear this terminology, and this is the one you'll most likely see when people talk about this, but if you hear this terminology, that's what it's referring to.

It's where does 1 Thessalonians 4, this reference in verse 17 to being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, that fit in this scheme of these woes or this tribulation that leads up to and precedes the second coming of Christ to set up his kingdom and to set up his new creation? Yeah, that's right. This presupposes I guess both of these, but especially this presupposes that I guess we're in heaven with Christ awaiting, awaiting for this time, this situation to play itself out, and then we would return with him to earth to set up his kingdom. Now you can sleep at night, you know exactly what these, all these positions, pre-trib, mid-trib, post-trib.

But again, I bring that up just because it is part of the language of our church today and has been historically. But just let me say, just let me say one thing. The church, as far as I can tell, the church has always tolerated a variety in this issue.

Unfortunately, this issue has often been used to cause division and separation among churches and among other Christians who should in fact be celebrating the fact that they both believe that Jesus is going to come back, definitely in history, and he is going to set up his kingdom and bring history to a close. That has always been what the church has believed. Again, go back and read the Apostles' Creed.

Go back and read some of the early creeds where they simply refer to the fact that Jesus will in fact return to judge, but to also save and reward his people. Jesus will return to set up his kingdom and bring history to a close. All the details surrounding that, in my opinion, are up for grabs.

The main issue thing is that we don't get too caught up in using this to divide and to, even worse, label those that are spiritual or not or have common sense or not. The church has always tolerated a variety of this. Interestingly, to demonstrate this, there was a book, I think it's actually been revised, but there was a book produced several years ago called *The Tribulation Pre-, Mid-, or Post-*.

And they had three persons arguing for each position, and they were all from the same school, the exact same seminary. And they argued their position. They interacted with each other.

So, it's one of those issues you may or may not be confronted with, but certainly one of those issues that ultimately should be approached with a fair degree of humility. Instead, we should choose to focus on what we can be certain of and what we can

agree on when it comes to understanding the eschatology of the Old and the New Testament. All right.

You probably want to know which one I fall under. I'm not going to tell you. A couple of other things.

Okay, I'm on the last one. But again, I don't really care. A couple of things.

Number one, in relation to this, part of the problem is, to listen to the very next verse, chapter 5 and verse 1. Paul says, now concerning the times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not have need to have anything written to you. This is a clear indication of the, remember we used the telephone metaphor as a way to understand the letters, that we're listening in to one end of the phone conversation. And apparently, Paul says, I've already told you about this.

So, he doesn't see any need to rehearse all the details. So again, in chapter 4, Paul isn't telling us everything he knows and everything he's already told the Thessalonians. He's already told them that.

And so, he says, you don't have any need for me to write to you in more detail about this. I've already told you, probably when he was with them back in Acts chapter 17. And now he just summarizes.

So, in a sense, we're a little bit impoverished. We come at this with a very partial knowledge. To use one of Paul's metaphors, we see through a glass or a mirror dimly when it comes to reading 1 Thessalonians 4. So again, part of the problem is we just don't have all the information because Paul has already told them and doesn't see the need to rehearse all the details again.

The other thing is that a comment I want to make back to verse 15. Paul says, for this, we declare to you by the word of the Lord. Now, what is the word of the Lord that Paul is referring to? Some are convinced that he's had a prophetic message from Jesus Christ himself.

That Christ has perhaps audibly spoken through his spirit to Paul, which he does claim. Remember back in 1 Corinthians, he discusses the gift of prophecy. So maybe Paul has received a revelation from Jesus Christ regarding what he's about to teach.

What do you think might be another option? When Paul says, what I'm saying is the word of the Lord, what could be another option? I mean, that's a possibility that he's received a revelation, a divine revelation from God himself, from Jesus himself about what he says in chapter 4. What else? How else might we account for chapter 4 being the word of the Lord? It's probably referring to a past section of Scripture, either the Old Testament or maybe something that Jesus himself taught, or maybe a

combination of both. But in your notes, you'll notice I have a little chart with parallels between 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 and Matthew 24. Matthew 24 is the lengthiest section of Jesus' teaching on his return, on the second coming.

And so, I personally think when Paul says, what I'm saying is the word of the Lord, he's basically, he is summarizing what Jesus taught in Matthew chapter 24. Not that Paul had Matthew, but he may have had a written account or again, a lot of the sayings of Jesus were circulating orally. But I think what Paul means when he says what I'm telling you in verse 15 is a word of the Lord, that is chapter 4 is the word of the Lord because it's based on Jesus' teaching in a section like Matthew chapter 24 and 25.

So, if you go back to Matthew 24 and 25, you'll read a rather detailed teaching of Jesus on the very coming of Christ. I'm not going to go through all of these, but it's interesting that there are just so many parallels between what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4 and 5 and what Jesus said back in Matthew 24 that it just makes you think that Paul is directly depending on Jesus. Now, finally, what problem was Paul addressing? And then I want to move through 2 Thessalonians very, very quickly as if we haven't gone through 1 Thessalonians quickly.

But what problem might Paul be addressing? Well, in other words, why did he have to remind them again? Again, this isn't the first time he's taught this. He appears to just be reminding them of what he's taught them before. Why does he have to rehearse this and remind them? Well, perhaps a scenario like this.

Is it possible that when Paul was with the Thessalonians back in Acts chapter 17, for some reason, teaching concerning the second coming of Christ was important, and he spent some time teaching them about Christ's return and about his coming and about the messianic woes, etc., and the coming of Christ, the day of the Lord, which we'll come back to that phrase, day of the Lord, in 2 Thessalonians. But perhaps Paul spent some time talking about that. Between the time Paul was in Thessalonica and the time now that he writes the letter, it appears that several people, perhaps in the congregation, in the church in Thessalonica, had died.

And now some of the Christians who were still living then were wondering if they were going to miss out or if they were going to be at a disadvantage when Jesus Christ returns. So, do you see that, Paul? Again, Paul had taught them, when he was in Thessalonica, Acts 17, he taught them about the second coming of Christ. And then he's left, and perhaps a couple or a few of the members have died, and some of the members in the church then are worried that their loved ones who have died, will miss out when Jesus returns. Will they miss out on those events? Or will they be at a disadvantage? And Paul's response is, no, they won't.

That's why I think he says, the dead in Christ will rise first, and then we who remain will meet them in the air. That's kind of Paul's way of saying, no, they won't be at a disadvantage. They will participate fully in the events that take place when Jesus Christ returns.

Therefore, don't be upset. Don't lose hope. But instead, encourage one another with these words.

Your loved ones will fully participate in the events that transpire when the not-yet arrives when Jesus returns. Although he doesn't say a lot as to why they thought that they might miss out, that kind of seems to me to be a likely explanation.

All right, so Paul has instructed the Thessalonian church regarding two issues, sexual immorality, but now the coming of Christ.

Perhaps because some of the Christians in Thessalonica wondered if those who had died who were Christians would miss out when Jesus returns, and Paul assures them, no, they'll participate fully. But now, let's look at the next piece of mail, the second letter to the Thessalonians. I'm going to assume that First and Second Thessalonians were written in that order.

It doesn't have to be that way. Again, remember, Paul's letters are generally arranged in the order of length, not in the order in which they're written. So second Thessalonians could have been written first, but I'm going to argue it makes better sense to see First Thessalonians written and then Second Thessalonians.

So why another letter to the Thessalonians? Well, apparently, apparently the Thessalonians responded, this isn't the whole problem or the whole issue, but apparently they overreacted to and responded a little bit too well to Paul's teaching in first Thessalonians. That is, listen to this, as to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and to our being gathered together with him. That's the reference back in chapter 4, being caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Now Paul says, now as to the coming of the Lord and being gathered, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed either by spirit or by word or letter as though from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. Apparently, the Thessalonians, after Paul wrote First Thessalonians, now the first Thessalonians, they've reacted to the opposite extreme, and they think that they are already in the day of the Lord. They think that they are about to witness the return of Christ, the second coming, the not yet, to wrap up history.

That may have, as Paul says, that may have come about because someone wrote a letter to them telling them that, as though Paul wrote it. Again, perhaps that was an overreaction. Again, notice how Paul, notice how he spoke in first Thessalonians

chapter 4. You can see where, along with a number of other things, the Thessalonians may have overreacted when Paul says that we who are alive, are left until the coming of the Lord.

I mean, could that not be taken by some to suggest that, oh, we're going to be alive when Jesus Christ returns? Therefore, we're already in the day of the Lord. So, whatever the case, however, they got there, the main problem with Second Thessalonians is the Thessalonian Christians now think that they are already in the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord was a term that referred basically to the end, the time.

It wasn't necessarily a literal day, a 24-hour period. It just referred to the time when God would return and set up His kingdom and the new creation. He would judge evil and He would reward His people.

That was referred to in the Old Testament as the day of the Lord. Now, some in the Thessalonian church thought they were already there, that the day of the Lord had already arrived. Now, here then is Paul's response.

Just to summarize, he basically says, the day of the Lord has not come. So, Thessalonians, you're not in the day of the Lord because there are certain things that have to happen that have not yet happened. That's basically a summary of Paul's letter to second Thessalonians, of second Thessalonians, is Thessalonians, you are not in the day of the Lord because before the day of the Lord can come, certain things have to happen and they haven't happened yet.

So, therefore, you're not in the day of the Lord. Now, the problem is, the key section is chapter 2:2-11. The problem is, the things that Paul lists, the things that he says, these haven't happened yet and until they do, the day of the Lord can't arrive.

So, Thessalonians, don't be deceived into thinking you're already in the end, that the coming of Christ to end history, it's right around the corner. Don't be deceived into thinking about that. Paul should come back and say those things today.

The latest, I was talking to some people the other day, and the latest prediction is May 12th, Jesus is coming back. So, sorry, you'll have to take finals, I'm sorry, or maybe not, no. You might just miss some of your finals.

So, anyway, but that's kind of how the Thessalonians, that was kind of a version of that, that they thought they were already in the day of the Lord and history was going to wrap up. So, Paul says, no, no, there are certain things that have not happened, but the problem is, the things that Paul lists. He lists three things.

He lists three things. Number one, the rebellion. He says the rebellion hasn't happened yet, the man of lawlessness hasn't come yet, and the restrainer that has to be taken away has not been removed yet.

So, does that help you out? Well, the problem is, what is this rebellion? I mean, the idea here is some apostasy or turning away from God. But Paul isn't really specific about what that is or what that will look like. To what extent is that going to take place? So, what about the man of lawlessness? Some have tried to identify this as a specific figure, like an antichrist figure.

Is Paul referring to a specific figure? Is he referring more to a kind of spirit or an attitude of rebellion that pervades society? Paul doesn't say. What about the restrainer? There have been all kinds of suggestions. Paul says the restrainer is now holding back evil, and only when the restrainer is removed, then evil will run its course and then the end will come.

But what in the world is a restrainer? Some have suggested the restrainer is God himself. Some have suggested it's the Holy Spirit. Some have suggested it's the church.

Some have suggested it's the gospel, the preaching of the gospel. Some have suggested it was the Roman Empire in the first century. There have been all kinds of suggestions.

But the problem is, we can't be sure exactly what any of these things are. Whether, perhaps again, the problem is, again, Paul says, don't you remember when I told you about these things? I have no need to tell you about the days and the times because I've already told you. So maybe the Thessalonians and Paul know exactly what's being talked about, and we're the ones who are left in the dark about exactly what these are.

But I think at the very least, the point is that Paul can say that there are certain things that have not happened that must happen, and until then, don't get so worked up and don't think that you're already on the verge of the end. Don't think that you're already in the day of the Lord. That's basically what 2 Thessalonians is about.

Now, I think when we put 1 and 2 Thessalonians together, it communicates a profound message about how... Thessalonians.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in New Testament History and Literature, lecture 24 on Philemon and Thessalonians.