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Faith Bible Church
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<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

Personal Study of the Bible-35 (2 Thessalonians 1:8 – the two groups of unbelievers)

After our last Bible class at FBC, an excellent question was asked about

2 Thessalonians 1:8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

The inquiry was about the two different groups: 1) “those who do not know God” and 2) “those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” Are there two distinct groups of unbelievers or just one group with two highlighted characteristics? I would like to take this opportunity to guide you in studying this, which illustrates the importance of regularly reading and understanding our Bibles. My knowledge of the Greek text does have many advantages. I can look at the Greek text and see that there are two separate groups because each group has a separate article/τοῖς (τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεόν and τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ). However, knowledge of the Greek in and of itself does not tell me who these distinct groups are. Sure, the fact that they are both described in participles emphasizes their nature in modes, but it does not tell me *who* they are. How would we know who they? by reading and reading and reading our Bibles, by becoming more and more familiar with the content of our English Bibles over the years.

In this lesson I would like for you to read and identify these two groups for yourself. For those in the group “those who do not know God,” read 1 Thessalonians 4:5 and Jeremiah 10:25. Read this before proceeding in this lesson. After reading these passages, look at these other passages which aid in identifying this first group: Eph. 2:12; Galatians 4:8; 1 Thess. 4:5; Romans 1:18-32.

After you read these passages, let’s move to the next group, “those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” For identification of this group, I would like for you to read Romans 10:16 (“they have not obeyed the gospel”). For further description of this group, read 1 Thess. 2:14-16; Acts 17:5, 13.

With the proper identification, you can see why Paul used the two descriptions for two distinct groups, as each group had a dominant characteristic. The second group knew the Scriptures and therefore on some level knew something about God, but were disobedient to the gospel and crucified the Messiah and persecuted Christians. The first group consisted of pagans who did not have the Bible and thus never really understood the true nature of God. Paul’s twofold ethnic and religious division has many applications during the Tribulation, but contextually it deals with two different groups of people that Paul faced, both of which were lost.

Both groups will face the same fate unless they believe in Jesus Christ, read 2 Thess. 1:9. Both will suffer the consequences of permanent separation from the presence of the Lord. They will both be banished from the presence of God; this is in direct contrast to what Paul says of believers in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, which you should read and reflect on in light of what is said here of unbelievers. Every single day of our lives brings us one step closer to being with Him ☺

In ‘Ehyeh,

Pastor Don Hargrove