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<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

Personal Study of the Bible-67
2 Thessalonians 3-
Your Character/Virtue In Time Will Be Reflected Through all of Eternity

This is our last PBS study of the Thessalonian texts. Read 2 Thessalonians 3, paying close attention to all of Paul's exhortations to spiritual virtue in light of the Lord's return. The time of the Lord's coming is strictly up to the Lord. What may seem as a delay in His coming is in reality the provision for real opportunities for us to become spiritually virtuous before we go to be with Him forever.

Although no believer ever need to fear judgment for sin, every believer will reflect what spiritual virtue or lack thereof he acquired in time. In other words, every believer's character on earth will be reflected throughout eternity. Recall that virtue is not about an isolated act here or there that a believer does. Virtue is character; it is all about that the *nature* of the person. For example, a gossip is not a person who may gossip here or there. A gossip is one whose character or nature has been habituated into becoming a gossip by habitual engaging in such activity. Their own actions (mental assent and verbal acts) have literally made them gossipers. The same can be said of other sins, vices, and evil—like believers who reject God's word regarding gathering with and supporting fellow believers (Heb. 10:25) or helping the poor (Matt. 25:31-46), and thus have become the kind of believers who are isolationists, non-caring, and generally greedy.

Don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that people will be wearing signs throughout eternity labelling them as gossipers, isolations, greedy, or selfish. What I am saying is that eternal rewards are always linked to character, which is why believers can lose rewards by losing character. What I am saying is that believers who have corrupted their character in the aforementioned ways will lack certain rewards due to corruption of those aspects of their characters. To be sure, all believers will be happy in Heaven. However, due to development of spiritual virtue, some believers are going to be happier than others and personally honored by Jesus Christ for spiritual activity.

Consider Demas, although he undoubtedly was spiritually productive and a real help to the Apostle Paul early in his ministry (Col. 4:14), he later lost his spiritual virtue/character, which resulted in him loving the kosmos and forsaking Paul (2 Tim. 4:10). Yes, Demas will be in heaven. Yes, he will be happy. Yes, he will have the same salvation righteousness as every other believer. He, like everyone else, will be in heaven solely by the righteousness of Christ. However, Demas is Demas, and *as far as rewards* he will forever be associated with unfaithfulness. His lack of faithfulness or virtue will be reflected in the fact that he will lack rewards that other believers have for their faithfulness. Although he will be happy in heaven, he will lack any rewards for being faithful. This is how his lack of earthly virtue as far as faithfulness will be reflected throughout eternity. As far as the gossip, there will be loss of rewards in areas of failure to love others—gossip is not merely lack of love, it is an evil that

invades other's privacy as it attacks and vilifies. And so the character or lack thereof that we develop over time has eternal ramifications. Read the following passages on loss of rewards and how a person's character is reflected in rewards in the next life: Matt. 25:21; Luke 19:17; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 4:5; 9:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:5; 1 John 2:28; Rev. 3:-5, 11-12; 19:8; 22:12. You and I are who we are in character, it is what makes us unique. Salvation does not make us unique among believers. We are all saved exactly the same way with the exact righteousness, all by His matchless grace. We are all cleansed from all sin by His grace. But what we do in time with phase two grace, in cultivating spiritual virtue, is what makes each believer unique in his own way in the plan of God. Every believer will manifest for all of eternity his acceptance or rejection of God's mandates and grace during his earthly life.

Notice the emphasis, once again, on the development of spiritual virtue in the last chapter of this Thessalonian letter: pray (3:1-2), grow in love of God and steadfastness in Christ (5), separate from certain believers (3:6), be an example of generosity (3:7-9), be disciplined (3:10-11), don't become a busybody (11), be responsible (12), never tire of doing good (13), be very discerning regarding fellow believers who do not believe the Word of God, yet continue loving them (14-15). Note how Paul closes out this Letter praying to the Lord and in doing so shows us that only God can really provide the believer with peace in every circumstance (16)—it is not a matter of positive thinking. All we can do is put ourselves in a position to accept His grace.

Again, 2 Thessalonians 2:6-15 is all about Paul dealing with some Thessalonians who thought that because Christ, and thus a new kingdom, were coming, they no longer needed to work; they could withdraw from business, and then expect fellow believers to support them. It is in this context that Paul laid down the great principle of life that *if any would not work, neither should he eat*. Any view of Christianity that makes a man neglect working for his livelihood is not of God. There is no virtue in being lazy or a moocher. Although Paul always advocated giving to those in need, he was also very strong in condemning the able-bodied who could not but would not work. He forbade the Church to support these lazy bums, and even urged fellow believers to separate from them. As strong as Paul's language is about these lazy believers in regard to making a living, it pales in comparison to the language God uses for those who are too spiritually lazy for God, Bible doctrine, and thus spiritual virtue (cf., Matt. 6:19-24; Heb. 5:11-6:8; Rev. 3:14-22).

2 Thessalonians 3:16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!

*In 'Ehyeh,
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