

The fascination of prophetic information in this chapter should not divert attention from the instruction which Paul gives. A pair of imperatives in 2:15 summarize the instructions in verses 1–5: stand firm and hold to the teaching.

From the two letters to Thessalonians and the Book of Acts we can piece together the situation in that church. They had been suffering persecution since its inception. They struggled to understand certain aspects of Christ's return. But they knew about Christ's return, about His gathering of believers to Himself, about the certainty of tribulation until then, about the day of the Lord, and certain attendant characteristics such as a great falling-away and the appearance of "the man of lawlessness."

But the Thessalonians had been deceived into thinking that the day of the Lord was already present. The reason they had been deceived was the neglect of what they had been taught. Presumptuous teaching about the future had shook them from their theological foundations and caused them to fear, because they did not stand firm on the Word of God. In three different ways—three different levels of command—Paul reinforces in the first five verses the need to stand firm and hold fast to the truth: a plea (vv.1–2), a prohibition (v.3a), and a rebuke (v.5).

I. A Plea (2:1–2): a "polite" command to avoid the dangers from not holding to Scripture

1. This was a brotherly, pastoral concern.
2. This was a concern arising from their misunderstanding regarding the future.
3. This was a dual concern (1) that they were being "unsettled", that is, "shaken in mind," tossed or torn away from the truth (cf. Ephesians 4:14; Hebrews 2:1), and (2) that they were being "alarmed," that is frightened, because they thought they were in the day of the Lord.

Two forces "shook" and "alarmed" them: false teaching and a willingness to allow their circumstances to interpret God's word. This is the danger against which Paul makes his plea. Don't lose your grip on the truth, or you will end up being afraid when you do not need to be. God's truth interprets circumstances and not the reverse.

II. A Prohibition (2:3a): a more "direct" command to guard against the attack which would loose them from Scripture

1. Deception produces false belief, but is particularly dangerous because it is not obvious unless someone or something reveals the deception. God's Word is what is needed to avoid spiritual deception.
2. Deception can come in many ways (v.3), but Paul suggests three possibilities for the deception of the Thessalonians (v.2).
 - a. "by some prophecy" (NIV), lit., "by some spirit" (cf. 1 Cor 14:12, 32; Rev 22:6; 1 John 4:1); a spiritual gift present in Thessalonica (1 Thess 5:19–20) but possibly in this case from an outsider. (Any supposed "leading" of the Spirit must always be examined in light of Scripture, because God will not lead contrary to His Word.)
 - b. "by some report" (NIV), lit., a "word", perhaps claiming to be something which Paul had said or communicated. (Even today claims of what Paul has said, such as in commentaries, must be measured against all of God's word and not simply accepted as true.)
 - c. "by some letter supposed to have come from us" (NIV), a serious suspicion which he guards against in 3:17. (Some reverse the attack today claiming that true letters from Paul were actually authored by others. This undermines the doctrine of inspiration, questions the understanding of the canon, and causes the same effect of fear in believers unless they know clearly the Word of God.)

III. A Rebuke (2:5): an "implied" command to fulfil their responsibility to remember Scripture

1. The problem was not a lack of information, but a failure to remember the truth.
2. The task of remembering the truth falls upon individuals (cf. Psalm 1; 119:11), upon the body of Christ (cf. Eph 5:19; 1 Thess 4:18), and upon elders and teachers (Phil 3:1; Rom 15:15; 2 Peter 1:12–13; 3:1–2; 1 John 2:21; Jude 5; 2 Tim 2:14; Titus 3:1). But we can call upon the help of God by His Spirit (John 14:26; Matt 10:19–20; Eph 6:17).

Uncertainty about future things derailed the Thessalonians and caused them fear. False teaching, presumptuous prophecy, and outright forgery deceived the Thessalonians. But it was not necessary, if they had only remembered the truth.

Guard yourself today in the same way that Paul directed them. Stand firm and hold to the truth. Read the Bible regularly and thoroughly. Study it. Memorize it. Discuss it. Explain it. Learn together so that you can remember together.