

Sometimes people must be told several times before they “get it”. It’s not always the fault of the one receiving the teaching. Sometimes, after we get a lesson, someone or something seems to distract us and we lose confidence in what we thought we understood. I think this is prevalent today in the church when it comes to doctrinal aspects of what we believe. For example, the “rapture” debate; I thought pre-trib rapture was very clear until I was introduced to the mid-trib and pre-wrath views. I started doubting my position even to the point of changing my position several times. I almost did the same with Calvinism and Armenism; I considered some of the tenets of Calvin and it started to make sense. I think this is an ok exercise but at some point, you have to take a stand based on the best, most reliable interpretations of the Scriptures that are at the base of these doctrines.

One might fairly ask, why did the Holy Spirit have the writers speak in a way that one might conclude two opposite ideas with the same verse? Wouldn’t it be better to be crystal clear about the meaning of various passages in both the OT and NT?

I think the answer is: on the essentials of our beliefs, for example, the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, the Scriptures are very clear! Major doctrinal differences in, say, the deity of Messiah, are due to men either accepting other than canonical manuscripts or rewriting the Bible to suit their needs. The former folks, like the Mormons, believe in another “revelation of Jesus Christ”; the latter folks, like the Jehovah Witnesses, rewrote the Bible to translate the “difficult” (i.e., opposing) passages to fit their deceptions.

However, on “non-essentials” (mainly consisting of ideas not related to salvation), things seem to be a bit more ambiguous;

How does one decide? I’d like to suggest that one must make a choice based on the FULL COUNSEL OF GOD, the CHARACTER OF GOD, the character of those holding these positions and the humility that says “Hm...I might be wrong”.

1. **The full-counsel of God** is the consistent reading and interpretation of all Scripture from Genesis 1 thru Revelation 22.
2. **The Character of God** towards those who are His children by blood cleansed us from all sin; We are different than non-believers due to our relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father. As Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:9-10
 - a. But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **His own special people**, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (10) who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained **mercy but now have obtained mercy**.
 - b. So, what I am saying is that we need to view Scriptures based on His Love, Grace, Mercy, kindness and Righteous Judgment to name a few of His wondrous attributes.
3. **The Character of those who hold these positions:**
 - a. I find many of the Calvinistic believers extremely intelligent, scholarly, and knowledgeable about the Scriptures. I also found that that they can be arrogant, prideful and unkind. This is a broad-brush based on my reading; however, I love Spurgeon, Martin Lloyd-Jones and others.

b. If I do not see the fruit of the Spirit exhibited in their writings, red-flags go up.

4. Humility

- a. Am I humble enough to admit that I was wrong about something I felt sure was so right?
- b. Are scholars, teachers, pastors humble in their writings or we read things like “the Scriptures DEMAND that we interpret them in this way”.
- c. One of the things I like about Pastor David Guzik’s commentaries is that he quotes extensively from other commentators which says to me he understands that he’s not the end-all/be-all of Bible commentators.

I spent a lot of time on this because 2 Thessalonians addresses issues that were raised in Paul’s first letter. This letter is believed to have been written shortly after the first.

(2 Thessalonians 1:1) Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Silvanus is the same man known as Silas who travelled with Paul on his second missionary journey. Both Silvanus and Timothy were well known by the church.

(2 Thessalonians 1:2) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul’s standard greeting praying they would have grace and peace granted by the Father and the Son.

(2 Thessalonians 1:3) We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,

Paul’s choice of words is interesting. “are bound” means that they felt an obligation to thank God for those in the church – because they “deserved” it due to their exceedingly growing faith and love that they show each other. Perhaps, some think, that word got back to Paul that his praise for them in his first letter was undeserved...he now writes that it certainly was deserved.

(2 Thessalonians 1:4) so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,

Boasting was surely “in the LORD” for the work Paul and others did among them...but as the language seems to suggest, it may have also contained some “look what we did...with the LORD”

Even during their trials and persecutions, they were patient and faithful!

I don’t think one can think it legalistic to feel **obligated** to thank the LORD for His kindness towards ourselves and others!

(2 Thessalonians 1:5) which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;

Only in God’s economy can one say that their persecutions and tribulations was evidence of the

righteous judgment of God. But, this type of circumstances for the believer is always redemptive that is, it is always for our growth, even though it is painful...as though going thru the Refiner's Fire:

"The beauty of this picture is that the refiner looks into the open furnace, or pot, and knows that the process of purifying is complete, and the dross all burnt away, when he can see his image plainly reflected in the molten metal." (Joyce Baldwin)

Listen to Peter:

1 Peter 1:6-9 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, **(7)** that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, **(8)** whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, **(9)** receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.

1 Peter 4:17 For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Counted Worthy: not that we are "seen as" worthy by what we do, but rather, we are "reckoned" worthy, that is, that Jesus's worthiness is accounted to them!

(2 Thessalonians 1:6) since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,

By the same token, our Righteous God will repay with tribulation those who persecute us. This not only will happen in the future but in the present time. And, it will not be for "purifying" as described above, but as pure and holy judgment!

(2 Thessalonians 1:7) and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

rather this designs a rest which remains for the saints after death in the grave, and at the coming of the Lord, and to all eternity; when they shall rest from all their toil and labor, and be freed from sin, and all disquietude by it, and from the temptations of Satan, and likewise from the persecutions of men; see

Job 3:11-17 "Why did I not die at birth? *Why* did I *not* perish when I came from the womb?
(12) Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse

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(16) Or *why* was I not hidden like a stillborn child, Like infants who never saw light? **(17)** There the wicked cease *from* troubling, And there the weary are at rest.

When the LORD is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels...

The problem with this phrase is that no one that I read comments on it! The issue is, the first part of the verse seems to be connected to the second part of the verse, that is, rest will be given to those believers with “us”, that is, Paul and others WHEN the Lord returns.

But the rapture doesn't mention “mighty angels”. SO how can we understand this?

First, let's read the next 3 verses:

(2 Thessalonians 1:8) in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9) These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, (10) when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

Clearly this is a strong reference to the second coming of Messiah. The “target” are those who do not know God and those who do not obey the Gospel of Jesus. There will be an everlasting “destruction” but this is NOT a “perishing” or “annihilation” such that evil people no longer exist. No, it's an eternal punishment. This disturbs even Christians because they cannot believe that eternal punishment, eternal fire is mandated for evil ones. Regardless of what kind of punishment is meted out, I think that being eternally separated from God's presence will be hell: they chose not to know Him, believe Him, submit to Him so all they will experience, so to speak, is His “Holy Justice”. No grace, mercy, love, light, warmth, joy in His Presence...they rejected all of this because they chose to reject their Creator!

Jesus taught:

Matthew 24:29-31 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: (30) And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (31) **And he shall send his angels** with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect (tribulation saints) from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

So, back to v7.

2 Thessalonians 1:7 And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels,

There are several ways of looking at this:

1. Some would interpret this as proof of a post-trib rapture and that we will enter our rest when Jesus returns to judge the nations. But, this obviously contradicts the clearer teaching on the pre-trib or even the mid-trib rapture. But, we already studied that Paul's teaching recorded in 1 Thess 4:13-18, a pre-tribulation rapture is God's plan for His bride.
2. The idea of “rest” might be considered our final rest when we enter heaven completely free of trials, tribulations and persecutions; it is a comfort to know that we will be with Paul and the other

saints...we will be there when our LORD appears (Greek *apokalupsis* = “revealed”) from heaven; There’s support for this with the Greek word for “when” which has the connotation of “rest”, meaning a set time in the future.

Albert Barnes: It would increase the comfort of the Thessalonians derived from the anticipation of the future world, to reflect that they would meet their religious teachers and friends there. It always augments the anticipated joy of heaven to reflect that we are to share its blessedness with them. There is no envy among those who anticipate heaven; there will be none there. They who desire heaven at all, desire that it may be shared in the highest degree by all who are dear to them.

It may be due to punctuation

The earliest Greek manuscripts were written in all capital letters (called uncials), and were written without spaces between the words but with some punctuation, though the punctuation seems not to have been used consistently. For an example of such a manuscript, see <http://www.bible-researcher.com/papy66big.jpg>. In the Middle Ages, Greek manuscripts began to be written in a cursive script called miniscules. These manuscripts at least had spaces between the words, and a more sustained use of punctuation. For an example, see <http://www.greekingout.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/ntmanuscript.jpg>.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you (7) and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us. At a set time in the future the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, (8) in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The bottom line here is that since one can make a case for multiple meanings, we need to fall back on “let Scripture interpret Scripture”. With that in mind we must fall back on what Paul has taught already: Stand firm in your sufferings; do not grow weary of the evil which seems to flourish as if God is unfair in His grace towards those outside the church. You are promised a rest and you can rest in the hope of that everlasting rest in the presence of your Savior and your God!

(2 Thessalonians 1:11) Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and the work of faith with power,

Do NOT think that “count you worthy” implies any work on your part. His faithfulness in sustaining and perfecting your faith “reckons” you worthy, that is, His worthiness is imputed to you just as your righteousness is! God “thinks” of you as worthy because of the work of His Son!

And HE will fulfill the good pleasure of His goodness (the good pleasure of His will):

1. It was His good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. **Luke 12:32**
2. It was His good pleasure to declare us as adopted sons **Ephesians 1:5**

3. It was His good pleasure to make known to us the mystery of His will of the Gospel of His Son and the uniting of all men. **Ephesians 1:9**
4. It was His good pleasure to work in us to cause us to want to do His will and His works prepared before the foundations of the world. **Philippians 2:13**

(2 Thessalonians 1:12) that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In everything we DO or SAY or THINK, it is all done with the Glory of our LORD Jesus Christ as our goal. Not just in a public way, but even when we are alone..... we are never truly alone!