

1 and 2 Thessalonians Resistance and Delay

Interpreting the Text:

1. The author of this letter refers frequently to “the lawless one” in chapter 2. Who might this be? Do you imagine this as an abstract figure to represent temptation, or someone more concrete, like the Roman emperor? How does your reading of chapter 2 change depending on how you envision this figure?
2. Do the images for eschatological conflict used in 2 Thessalonians play any role in how we think about Christian hope? Do you see any correlation between these teachings and what other passages of the New Testament say on the topic? Where do they agree or disagree?

Applying the Text:

1. The author of 2 Thessalonians seems to be engaged in a reinterpretation of early Christian hope and expectation. If this is so, what are the implications for our understanding of what Scripture does?
2. The framing of eschatological hope in this letter seems to pay special attention to issues of community coherence. In the process those who disagree seem to be demonized as agents of an inimical spiritual power. Does the letter reflect a tendency in all situations of disagreement that we should be aware of? Are there ways in which Christians should frame their disagreements with others?
3. Does the language of “sanctification,” used for what happens within the life of the community, resonate with contemporary Christians? What does it suggest to you? And what are its practical implications?