

STEADFAST CHRISTIANITY

A STUDY OF 2 THESSALONIANS

STUDY EIGHT

Your Distinguishing Mark

2 Thessalonians 3:16–18

One of the distinguishing marks of the believer is a sense of Christ's surrounding presence in all circumstances. That's what gives you peace.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

AMBASSADORS wield a weighty role. As the highest-ranking diplomats, they officially represent their country in international affairs. In their role as representative, they build relationships, make promises, and negotiate matters impacting millions.

But ambassadors *never* speak for themselves. They speak on behalf of the president who sends them. We might say they bear the *distinguishing mark* of another person. It's the name of the person whom they represent that has authority—not the ambassador's own name.

Think of the name you bear as a Christian. The term *Christian* means “one who belongs to Christ.” Because He claims you as His own, your words, your attitudes, and your actions must reflect His character. In a real sense, you are His ambassador. You bear His name, His distinguishing mark, before a watching world.

Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, was the epitome of an ambassador. He represented His Savior's name and His Savior's church. In our final passage in this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we examine Paul's distinguishing mark—his personal signature that authenticated this letter as his. But he still bore the signature of Christ—his true distinguishing mark—which is the same name our gracious God has granted us.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" (2 Corinthians 5:20)

As you open God's Word, thank the Lord for counting you worthy to serve as His ambassador. Ask Him to shine through you as a beacon of His light in a dark world.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The apostle Paul enjoyed a particularly close relationship with the fledgling church at Thessalonica. He founded the church—preaching, teaching, and modeling their common Savior to them. Paul frequently commended the Thessalonian believers for their depth of faith, labor of love, and expectant hope in Christ's return. In kind, they welcomed Paul's teaching and doctrine, imitating his exemplary walk with Christ.

As we conclude our study of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, let's focus on his life as a living letter of Christ, on the Thessalonians' lives as living letters throughout Macedonia, and on our lives as living letters wherever we call home.



Observation: A Fitting Conclusion

As living letters, we reflect the Lord. Although people cannot see the Author, they can see His words and feel His impact through us. His presence is most apparent when we demonstrate His peace in all circumstances.

Use your skills of observation as you read *2 Thessalonians 3:16–18*, noting the key words Paul used to sum up the main themes of his letter.¹

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The Believer's Peace and the Lord's Presence—2 Thessalonians 3:16

In Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian church, what name did Paul assign to the Lord in 2 Thessalonians 3:16a? Why is this significant?

The apostle prayed that the Thessalonians might experience peace “in every situation” (2 Thessalonians 3:16) through the Author of peace. How does Jesus provide you peace personally, interpersonally, and spiritually with God?

The Apostle's Mark—2 Thessalonians 3:17

This verse forms a bridge between Paul's prayer in 2 Thessalonians 3:16 and his benediction in 3:18. To record his inspired letters, Paul typically used an *amanuensis*—a scribe, secretary, or assistant who takes dictation or who copies manuscripts. However, in this passage, Paul took the pen and wrote in his own style. What did he write in 3:17?

The Lord's Grace—2 Thessalonians 3:18

Paul likely continued writing in his own hand as he concluded the letter. His prayer of benediction is nearly identical with the final verse of his previous letter: “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (1 Thessalonians 5:28). What distinguishing quality of Jesus Christ characterizes all believers? Why would Paul conclude with this mark?

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If I have one major prayer for us, it is that our future will be marked by grace and not law. Not tablets of stone. Not a legal rigidity that requires people to measure up to our particular two-by-four standard. Not that they're to live as they please, but that they live as Christ is pleased for them to live.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Marks Bearing Purpose

God marks every Christian with the name of Christ, including His unique character qualities and purpose. Paul specifically prayed that “the Lord of peace” would give the Thessalonians “his peace at all times and in every situation” (2 Thessalonians 3:16).

Reflecting on 2 Thessalonians, what were this group’s challenging circumstances that demanded peace only Christ could supply?

Paul’s *distinguishing mark* in 3:17 was his own handwriting, something he included in every letter which personalized his greeting to each church. But for the Thessalonians, Paul’s signature was far more than a personalized touch. Refer to 2:2–3. What crisis was the church facing? What was the source of their deception? Why was Paul’s authenticating mark so critically important?

Paul prayed: “The Lord be with you all” and “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (3:16, 18). How does the presence of Christ and His grace in the daily grind of life give us peace? How does His presence make a difference in your spirit when you feel anxious or upset?

I think it is one of the distinctive marks of the believer to have this sense of a surrounding presence in circumstances that no one else can sustain.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: Living Letters of Christ

To avoid being accused by critics for lacking proper credentials, in Paul’s day, traveling teachers carried letters of reference to prove their authority. But Paul didn’t rely on such documents that could easily be forged. What was his “letter” to prove his teaching was from God, according to *2 Corinthians 3:1–3*?

If we are living letters, and we are, if we’re salt and light, and we are, if others are to see our good works and glorify our Father, and they are, then the whole purpose is to see how this living letter part applies to living.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Believers are *living letters* of Christ—“carved not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts” (*2 Corinthians 3:3*). What names has Christ written on us to identify us as His own? In the table below read the verse in the left column, and in the right column, briefly define the meaning of your identity as a believer.

Mark	Meaning
Christian <i>Acts 11:26</i>	
Saint <i>1 Corinthians 1:2</i> <i>2 Thessalonians 1:9–10</i>	
Sheep <i>1 Peter 2:25</i>	
Bride of Christ <i>Ephesians 5:25–26</i> <i>Revelation 19:6–8</i>	
Citizens of Heaven <i>Philippians 3:19–21</i>	

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All believers bear the distinguishing mark of Jesus. And yet, no two people are the same. God has made us with unique personalities, spiritual gifts, interests, and talents. These are our *personal* distinguishing marks.

Paul recorded lists with unique gifts given by the Holy Spirit to believers to discover that very purpose. According to *Romans 12:4–8*; *Ephesians 4:11–12*, what is your gift that you display as a living letter of Christ?

What's your mark? What can you contribute? You can contribute the exercising of your gift. You can teach. You can serve. You can minister. You can evangelize. You can write music. You can counsel. You can write letters. You can pray. You can . . . name it. That's what you can do to contribute to Christ's cause.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Concluding Thoughts

In our fast-moving world, how do you display the mark of Christ in your unique way? In 2 Corinthians 8:5 and 9:6–7, 9, Paul gave us four guiding concepts. We should use our gifts *personally, bountifully, cheerfully, and broadly*. Employ your gift. Express your gift. Do ministry and watch God work!

How are you using your spiritual gift to fulfill your role in Christ's body?

Christ frees us to be who He made us to be. As you live out Christ's plan for you, you can experience His presence and His peace. Is your life marked by peace from the Lord of peace Himself? Where and when do you most see it? Are you facing a circumstance that rattles your peace? What is it, and how might Jesus supply what you need?

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As you close your study of 2 Thessalonians, take a few quiet moments to reflect on this wonderful letter. Listen to God speaking to you through a verse or a principle. What stands out as a message from the Lord to you today?

Reminding yourself of who you are strengthens you when you feel tempted and comforts you when you hurt. Think of the name you bear. You're a Christian—one who belongs to Christ. What a precious reassurance when you feel wounded and harassed like the Thessalonians believers! You don't belong to this world and its hateful ways. You belong to Christ, who has your life in His hands. Trust Him and feel His peace.



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord, it's amazing to think what the psalmist has said, "Even the days of our lives are recorded in Your book before there was even one of them." How glorious is Your history. I am privileged to be a part of it. Supply me Your peace. Remind me of Your presence. Help me discover my distinguishing mark. May I exercise it. Encourage me with what I have learned and, more importantly, with how I apply the truth of Your wonderful Word. In the name of Jesus, who gave me this letter and who has written His name on my life, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1986, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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