

# 1 Thessalonians

## Chapter 2

### The Big Picture

Apparently, someone or some group had tried to make the Thessalonian believers think that Paul was just another self-serving philosopher living off his particular twist of philosophy. They tried to say that he was in it for the money, material gain, or sexual favors just like other wandering philosophers. In Paul's response to this apparent accusation, he reminds the Thessalonians of the character he exhibited while ministering among them. Specifically, he reminds them that:

- 1) He was shamefully treated at Philippi because of his message.
- 2) He was bold to speak the message in spite of significant opposition.
- 3) He exhorted not in deceit, uncleanness, or guile.
- 4) He saw the Gospel as a divine trust given to him by God.
- 5) He did not please men with his message but God.
- 6) His conscience was clear before God who tries the hearts.
- 7) He did not use flattering words to get a response.
- 8) He did not exhibit coveteousness and called God to be his witness.
- 9) He did not seek after glory or human accolades.
- 10) He did not abuse his authority as an apostle but was gentle like a nursing mother.
- 11) He had a great love for the Thessalonians to the extent he was willing to die for them.
- 12) His great desire was to impart the Gospel which brings life.
- 13) He worked to provide not only for himself, but for the others that worked with him so that the Thessalonians would not be charged for his physical needs.
- 14) He lived holy, justly, and blamelessly in their presence.
- 15) He exhorted, comforted, and charged them just like a father his children so as to produce spiritual maturity and growth in their lives.

**1** For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

Paul begins the defense of his character by reminding the Thessalonian believers of what happened when he appeared in their city. By reviewing his journey in Acts 16-17, we find that Paul had just left Philippi after having been shamefully treated by the civic leaders. He had the gentiles mad because he healed the woman with a demon, and the Jews were mad because to them he taught heresy.

He then came to Thessalonica and began ministering in the synagogue, teaching and arguing from Scriptures how that Christ was the Messiah. Because of his teachings, some of the Jews became so angry they got some rabble down in the marketplace together and tried to run Paul and his companions out of the city. This caused no small uproar and resulted in Paul leaving the city for Berea.

However, in those three short weeks we find that some of the Jews were persuaded, many Gentiles became believers, and many leading women of the city became believers. Even though Paul ministered a short time, he had significant results in the preaching of the Gospel to the point that a church was established.

**2** But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

No doubt the Thessalonian believers had heard about the persecutions suffered by Paul at Phillipi. Both cities were on the Egnatian highway and as such news would travel fast from one city to the next. We are reminded that according to Acts 16 Paul and Silas were beaten without trial, put into prison, and commanded to be kept there. God, however, intervened with an earthquake and after the city magistrates realized they had illegally beaten a Roman citizen asked Paul and Silas to leave the city.

The point that Paul is making is that a self-serving philosopher interested only in physical and material gain would not have suffered like this. He would bring a message that would be popular with everyone, not one that would cause him to be beaten, cast into prison, and shamefully treated. There is no way he would be run out of one town on a rail for his message only to go to the next city and face the same treatment. The bottom line is that the message Paul preached continued to bring problems and persecutions. Thessalonica was no different. After only three short weeks the entire city was in an uproar over his message. This is not the message of a person seeking material gain. Either Paul is mad, or the message is true.

### **Some Questions to Ask About a Preacher**

**How can we identify a false teacher or false prophet.? Why not ask these questions:**

- 1) **Is their emphasis on material or worldly gain and pleasures?**
- 2) **Is their lifestyle characterized by coveteousness?**
- 3) **Are they, or have they, suffered persecution because of their message?**
- 4) **Do they use flattering words that make people like them?**
- 5) **Do they preach a popular message that makes people feel good?**
- 6) **Are they always asking for money or favors?**
- 7) **Is their ministry characterized by a love for others to the point of self-sacrifice?**
- 8) **Is their ministry centered around pleasing God, or men?**
- 9) **Do they exhibit humility or do they seek the praise of men?**
- 10) **Is their life characterized by integrity and godly attitudes and actions?**
- 11) **Do they live simply or do they live a luxurious lifestyle?**
- 12) **Is their focus on the spiritual maturity of their hearers, or on physical wealth?**
- 13) **Are the constantly making demands of loyalty or obedience to them from their flock?**

**3** For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

Paul summarizes the content of his message by saying that it is not characterized by deceit, guile, or uncleanness. Deceit emphasizes error. The message of the Gospel is not one of error but one of truth. In fact, truth is one of the major cornerstones of God's revelation to man. Unlike the other wandering philosophers whose messages were founded on the erroneous thinking of men, Paul's message was based on the timeless truths of God.

Secondly, his message was not characterized by uncleanness. This refers to the purity of his motives. He was not out to gain material or sexual favors, but was interested in sharing the truth without cost or obligation. Unlike the other wandering philosophers who made their living by deceiving and cheating their hearers, Paul's message was one of purity.

Finally, his message was not characterized by guile. This refers to the notion of entrapment or baiting the hearer. Again, Paul is not into preaching the Gospel to gain wealth, prestige, or honor from men. His motives are pure in that his only reason to preach was the compelling call of God.

**4** But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

This is why Paul's ministry was not characterized by deceit, guile, or uncleanness. It was a divine trust. The message of the Gospel is a most valuable message, and it should never be mixed with covetousness or men-pleasing trappings. At its heart, the Gospel is offensive as it tells man they are radically depraved and there is nothing they can do about it.

Paul appeals to his conscience by saying that the message he preached was preached for one reason only, God had entrusted him with it, and God would judge him for how he carried out his divine task of preaching. Because of this, Paul was not at all interested in pleasing men, but in pleasing God, and God alone.

This is an important point that we do well to take heed. The Gospel is the most precious message we have. Someday each one of us will give an account of how we handled the treasure of the Gospel. Those who are in the ministry for wealth, power, or some ego-trip will have to give an account to God on their prostitution of the message. Even those of us who are not called to full-time ministry have this precious message to share to others, and even we will be called into account of how we handled God's divine treasure.

**5** For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

Paul furthers his defense by reminding the Thessalonian believers that he never used flattering words in order to draw men to himself nor did he exhibit an attitude of covetousness. One of the sure-fire ways to identify a false teacher or prophet is to examine their ministry in light of these two characteristics. If someone claims to have a message from God, yet takes every opportunity to flatter his hearers in order to endear them to himself or make them feel good, he is not preaching the Gospel.

This is something we need to think about very carefully today. Many churches are becoming so sensitive to not offending the unbeliever they fail to proclaim the truth of the Gospel message. Fearing the disfavor of men, they court the disfavor of God. That is not to say we are to be obnoxious about the message, as many well-intentioned "fire and brimstone" preachers may be. Rather, we are to be passionate about the message while at the same time insuring that it is given in its pure and undiluted form. When we make an effort to downplay or omit some of the more offensive parts of the Gospel, we soon find ourselves proclaiming a non-saving message.

Another way in which we can prostitute the message is to be more concerned about the offerings than about truth. Whenever we succumb to the pressure of popularity, we begin to preach a non-saving gospel. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he did not do this. He was not interested in their accolades, he did not court popularity, and he was not interested in advancing his own material wealth. Instead, as we read in a few verses, he worked hard not only to provide for his own material needs, but to support any and all others that labored with him in the ministry. He labored by day to preach at night so that he would not have to take any money from the Thessalonians. This is not the characteristic of one who courted favor and money.

### Some Assorted False Prophets and Their Teachings About Money

*“After you wash the poverty from your hands, take out the largest bill or check you have, that \$100, \$50, or \$20 bill, hold it in your clean hands and say, “In Jesus name I dedicate this to God’s work,” and expect a miracle return of money.” (marketing ploy by David Epply)*

*“Do you have a financial mountain in your life? Start talking to your money. Tell your checkbook to line up with God’s word. Talk to your business. Command customers to come into your business and spend their money there. Talk to the mountain.” (Norville Hays)*

*“You can have what you say. You can write your own ticket with God. And the first step in writing your own ticket with God is to say it.” (Kenneth Hagin)*

*“If you’ve got one dollar faith and ask for a ten-thousand dollar item, it ain’t gonna work. It won’t work. Jesus said “according to your faith” not “according to God’s will for you, in His own good time, if it is according to His will, if He can work it into His busy schedule.” He said, “according to your faith be it unto you.” Now I may want a Rolls Royce and don’t have but bicycle faith, guess what I’m gonna get, a bicycle. But guess what He’s got?” (Fredrick Price)*

**6** Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

Paul continues his defense by again reminding the Thessalonians he did not seek the glory of men. The idea of glory here is honor. There are those who seek to be honored by men, and as such they prove themselves to be false teachers of truth. The Gospel is not a message that honors men, rather it is a message that honors God.

Furthermore, Paul makes it clear here that he was not burdensome to the Thessalonians. The idea here is that although he had a right as an apostle to receive support from the Thessalonians, he forfeited that right in order that no one could say he was in it for the money. Many men made their living going from town to town proclaiming one philosophy after another. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to be perfectly clear that the Gospel was not just another one of those philosophies.

**7** But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

**8** So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

Instead of being burdensome, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he cared for them as a mother cares for her children. This is not the character of one who seeks the honor and accolades of the crowd. Just as a mother cares for her children who can do nothing in return, so Paul freely cared for the Thessalonians demanding nothing.

This care was so deep that Paul desired not only to share the Gospel, but would have given his life for the Thessalonians. A mother’s love for her children is so deep that she would sacrifice herself to save the lives of her children, so Paul would sacrifice himself for the well-being of the Thessalonians. This is not the character of one who is motivated by selfish motives.

**9** For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

**10** Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

Pauls conduct among the Thessalonians was characterized by labour and travail. Both words carry the idea of working to exhaustion. Paul worked long hours, both night and day, so that he would be able to take nothing from the Thessalonians for support. Why? So that there would be no confusion in the minds of the Thessalonians that the Gospel and money were in no way connected. By refusing to take support from the Thessalonians, Paul was able to preach the Gospel without charge.

Now some could say that Paul did this only temporarily, so that after he had gathered a large following he could then begin to ask for money or favors. In order to answer this Paul reminds them how holily, justly, and unblameably he lived among the Thessalonian believers. Paul's life was an open book. He was not afraid of anyone examining his life since he had nothing to hide. This is unlike many today who shun exposure and examination at all costs.

**11** As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,

**12** That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

Rather than court favor with the Thessalonians, Paul exhorted them to follow his example. He was not like many today who say "Don't do as I do but do as I say!" Paul could say, "Do as I do!" In other words, Paul's life was such a model of godly character and virtue he could encourage anyone to follow his example.

What example is that? It is the example of our Lord. Paul wanted those to whom he preached the Gospel to live a life that matched the message. Being a believer is a high calling. We are children of a holy and righteous Father, and as such we should want to do everything possible to live up to the image of such a position. When we live a holy life, we manifest the character of God to those around us. We make the invisible God visible.

### **The Walk of the Believer According to Paul**

1. We are to walk in Faith - Romans 4:12, 2 Corinthians 5:7
2. We are to walk in newness of life - Romans 6:4
3. We are not to walk after the flesh - Romans 8:4
4. We are to walk honestly as in the day - Romans 13:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:12
5. We are to walk in the Spirit - Galatians 5:16, 25
6. We are to walk in good works - Ephesians 2:10
7. We are to walk in love as Christ loved us - Ephesians 5:2
8. We are to walk as Children of the Light - Ephesians 5:8; 1 John 1:7
9. We are to walk in wisdom - Ephesians 5:15; Colossians 4:5
10. We are to walk worthy of the Lord - Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12
11. We are not to walk disorderly - 2 Thessalonians 3:11

**13** For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

Paul now returns to his source of joy, and that is that the Thessalonian believers did not receive the message of the Gospel as just another philosophy to add to the many that existed at that time, but rather as the Word of God. This word is characterized by what it does, and that is it produces change. The Thessalonian believers did not receive the truth Paul preached as merely academic information, but rather as information that leads to action. In their case, it was a transformation from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Paul's term to describe what the word does is effectual. In other words, the Word of God has inherent within it power to change lives. It is not inert. Isaiah speaks of the word as being transforming in Isaiah 55:10-11, *"For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."*

**14** For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

**15** Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

**16** Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Here we find the proof that the message Paul preached among the Thessalonian believers was effectual and life-changing, namely, that those who responded to the message suffered persecution. One of the distinguishing marks of true Christianity is that those who name the name of Christ suffer persecution from those who know not God. This persecution can take many forms. In a land such as America the price is social ostracization or ridicule. In other nations those who are believers do not the better jobs or better opportunities. In other nations, believers are martyred for their faith. It does not really matter what form persecution takes, rather it matters that we endure persecution since endurance is a proof of genuine salvation.

In the case of the Thessalonian believers, their transformation from idolaters to believers resulted in social pressures from those who hated the message of the Gospel. Believers no longer participated in the pagan rituals and practices prevalent in the society of that day. Jews who became believers in essence made the proclamation that the Jewish leaders killed their very own Messiah, and as a result suffered from the hands of fellow Jews. In every way, being a Christian was not a popular thing,

As an aside, this is one of the great proofs of election, and that is, those who are elect will persevere to salvation regardless of the price. Nothing will keep them from salvation. No cost is too great, and no sacrifice too big. Why is this? It is because God gives the true believer the strength to endure any persecution. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:7 that we are *"kept by the Power of God."* This is comforting to the believer. If it was up to us to endure persecution on our own, we would fail miserably. It is only the sustaining power and grace of God given to the elect that enables them to face any trial.

## The Results of Suffering

### A. Trials Test the Strength of our Faith

The first result of suffering is that our faith is tested, not as much for God's sake, as it is for ours. When Job was going through his affliction he had to come to grips with his faith in God. One of the strongest things he said is found in Job 13:15 where we read, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him." Job believed in God even if God took his life. That is faith.

### B. Trials Humble Us

One of the most detestable things in God's sight is a proud person. If we are proud, we can be certain that God will bring suffering our way to break us of pride. God cannot allow his children to trust in their own resources and ignore others. Christianity is an other-centered way of life, and if we are not living it the way we should, we open ourselves up to suffering.

### C. Trials Wean Us From Worldly Things

A third result of suffering is that it weans us from worldly things. As believers, our home is not here, but there. Our treasure is not to be here, but there. When we go through trials and suffering we are reminded that the things of this world cannot bring true pleasure and happiness.

### D. Trials Call Us to an Eternal Hope

A fourth result of trials is that we are reminded of our eternal hope. If the Christian life was one of ease, wealth, and prosperity, we would not want to leave. After all, who wants to go to heaven, a place that one has never seen, when one has it all down here?

### E. Trials Reveal What We Really Love

A fifth result of trials and suffering is that they reveal what we really love. Many say that they love their families, but when a trial hits they run away. Many say that they truly love the Lord, but when suffering comes, they bail out. Suffering has a way of clarifying things and showing us what we really think is important.

### F. Trials Teach Us To Value God's Blessings

Undoubtedly, one of the most prevalent problems with people today is their lack of gratitude. This has even leaked into the church where we find many believers who are not grateful to God for what He has given them or done for them. We are constantly being told that we deserve more, that we need to demand more from God, and if we don't have everything we want it is because we lack faith.

**G. Trials Enable Us To Help Others**

Probably no trial in life is worse than being comforted by someone who has no idea of what it is you are going through. We want to cry like Job, "I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all." On the other hand, nothing is so wonderful as to have a friend walk with us through our trial who knows the way, since they have walked that very same path before.

**H. Trials Produce Endurance and Strength**

In James 1:2-4 we read, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." James is telling us that the product of suffering is endurance, the ability to bear up under adversity and difficulty. Our problem is that we want to enjoy the fruit of suffering, without the suffering. We want to enjoy the fruits of labor, without the labor. This is not possible in the spiritual realm. God has designed that we learn endurance and strength by facing trials, and only when we learn to depend on Him, can those trials be faced successfully.

**I. Trials Produce Future Glory**

The final result of suffering is that it produces eternal glory. God has decreed that the path to glory is through the valley of suffering. In Romans 8:18 we read that the "sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us.", and in 2 Corinthians 4:17 we are told that our "light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Paul elaborates a bit on the source of the persecutions faced by the Thessalonians by referring to the Jews who were responsible for the death of Christ. His description of these Jews leaves little doubt as to their guilt. First, they killed their own Messiah and his prophets. Christ mentions this in Matthew 23:29-35 when he confronts the Pharisees in the Temple with these words, " *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.*"

Secondly, Paul states that these Jews are "please not God and are contrary to all men." In rejecting the message of the Messiah and his messengers, the Jews place themselves against God as His enemies. In refusing to hear the message and persecuting the messengers, they in effect war against God and the only message of salvation given to men. By rebelling against God, they become the enemies of all men since they hinder the spread of the saving Gospel.

The result of this activity is that they fill up the wrath of God. The picture here is one of God giving them enough rope to hang themselves. God waits patiently while the sinner sins and sins and sins. This sin fills up a cup of wrath that ultimately overflows and bursts in judgment against the sinner. In the case of the Jew, the wrath of God would be held back for another twenty or so years, but would eventually overflow in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.



**17** But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

**18** Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

Paul answers the accusation of his lack of care for the Thessalonians by assuring them that his absence was not a volutary absence, but a forced absence. Some detractors had most likely told the Thessalonians that the reason Paul was absent is that he did not get the honor, money, or power he wanted and as a result left for greener pastures. Or maybe, he did not really care for the Thessalonian believers at all.

This was far from the truth. Paul had great affection for this church and assured them that he longed to be in their presence and enjoy their fellowship. The reason he did not visit them was not his lack of desire, but rather that Satan hindered him. Most likely this is a reference to the persecutions and adverse circumstances faced by Paul as he sought to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. At every turn he found himself face to face with the enemy of our souls, and each step forward was a step taken with a great deal of pain and suffering. Satan opposes God and all those who name the name of Christ.

**19** For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

**20** For ye are our glory and joy.

Far from being forgotten by Paul, he assures the Thessalonians that they are a reward in and of themselves. One of the joys that Paul had to look forward to was the joy of fellowship he would share with his spiritual offspring in heaven. The very sight of these believers would bring great rejoicing to Paul in that day.

Some use this verse as a reference to a "crown" we get when we get to heaven. Contextually, this understanding is not possible. Paul is not talking about some crown he could wear on his head, but rather that the Thessalonian believers themselves were the reward, the crown. One of the rewards Paul had to look forward to was the eternal joy and fellowship he would share with those who came to Christ through his preaching.