

August 4, 2024

“The Word of God”
Lesson 1

I Thessalonians 2:13 – 3:5

Intro

Thessalonica was and is a port city in Macedonia where Paul founded a church during his second missionary journey. The city was a mixture of Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures. Paul and Silas preached in the Jewish synagogue from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. They succeeded in persuading some Jews and many Gentiles of this truth. But other Jews saw them as a threat and were envious of their success. They got the authorities to begin persecuting these new Christians. All the time the church was growing, it faced the challenge of persecution. Paul wrote this letter to comfort and encourage the Thessalonian believers during these trials.

Read I Thessalonians 2:13 – 3:5

1. vs. 13: Paul is thankful for the Thessalonians because of their accepting the Word of God
 - Paul says they accepted it “as it actually is, the word of God”
 - The NT didn’t exist yet, so what they accepted was Paul’s oral testimony to them
 - Paul explained in Gal. 1:11-12 why his words were to be taken as authoritative
 - “the gospel I preached is not of human origin [but] by revelation of Jesus Christ”
 - Every believer must do the same—accept the Scriptures as The Word of God
 - This is vital to salvation, and to one’s spiritual growth
 - Paul says that the word “is indeed at work in you who believe”

2. vs. 14: Paul says here that these believers are doing well
 - They have become “imitators of God’s churches in Judea”
 - They are following the examples of the leaders who followed Jesus
 - They are following the right beliefs, but they are also following the pattern of persecution
 - He says “You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews”
 - These suffering believers are struggling with this persecution
 - Paul reminds them that they are not alone, that other believers have also been persecuted
 - According to Acts 17:4-5, the Thessalonians were persecuted by Jews, not by Gentiles
 - This is who Paul is referring to when he says “you suffered from your own people”

3. vs. 15: Paul makes it clear he’s referring to Jewish leadership by what he says here
 - The small group of Jewish leaders were responsible for Jesus’ death
 - They were responsible for the death of prophets in the Old Testament
 - They were responsible for driving out/away Paul and other apostles
 - Paul notes a horrible thing about them—they are “hostile to God”
 - They are hostile to everyone, he says
 - This means they are hostile to everyone who stands with/for God

4. vs. 16: The Jewish leaders didn’t want Paul and the apostles preaching to the Gentiles
 - There is a long history of animosity between the Jews and the Gentiles
 - Remember that anyone not a Jew is a Gentile

This means all foreign nations, with Rome at the front of the list
The harshness of the Romans toward the Jews led to the Maccabean revolt (167-160 BC)
These Jewish leaders appear to be more determined to punish Gentiles than to follow God

God says many times in the OT that Gentiles will be a part of His kingdom
The Thessalonians personally saw Paul and Silas persecuted (see Acts 17:5-9)
Paul here is equating their attitudes/actions with those of the scribes and Pharisees
He says God's wrath has "come upon them at last"

The phrase "at last" here seems to mean "completely"
He does not specify what that wrath is; they do not appear to be suffering at the moment

5. vs. 17: Paul notes two things here that indicate his intense feelings toward the Thessalonians
He says they were "separated from you"

This is because of the mob violence against Paul and Silas
They were forced to leave for safety's sake; they didn't want to go
He also says that they were separated "in person, not in thought"
They had to leave physically, but they never quit thinking of these believers
They had only spent a short time there before being forced out
Paul and Silas want to come back to continue teaching and fellowshiping

6. vs. 18: Their desire to return was so great that Paul appears to have made many attempts to do so
He uses the phrase "again and again"—multiple efforts
Satan is the enemy of God's people; he is responsible for Paul's inability to return
He would certainly not want Paul to return and strengthen these younger Christians

7. vs. 19-20: Paul has carried out God's leading for him in regards to preaching the gospel
Here he says that his own hope, joy, and crown is the people who have come to Christ
That is what will give him joy and glory
When he stands before Jesus at His coming, these believers will be proof of his ministry

8. vs. 3:1-2: These two verses show that Paul was highly concerned about these new believers
He says "when we could stand it no longer"
He has been thinking about them often, and with concern for their spiritual lives
He needs to know, but he can't go back, even though he wants to
So he does the next best thing—he sends Timothy back to "strengthen and encourage"

9. vs. 3: Paul wants to see them largely because he's worried how persecutions may impact their faith
He says he wants "no one (to) be unsettled by these trials"
And he reminds them that trials are a guarantee of the Christian life
"we are destined for them"
So he wants to help them get through the present time with the correct attitude
Persecutions will come; keep your faith to get through them
Jesus said, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (John 15:18)
Paul reminded Timothy of this (2 Tim. 3:12)
"All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"

10. vs. 4: Paul also reminds them that he told them that he and Silas would be persecuted
He knows this because this has happened to him throughout his journeys
They should not be surprised that they also are being persecuted
Hardships are inevitable, and God can use them to make us more like Jesus
Hardships can distinguish those of deep or shallow faith (see Matt. 13)
They are certainly part of counting the cost of becoming a disciple (Luke 14:26-27)
11. vs. 5: If Satan was preventing Paul from returning to Thessalonica, what might he also be doing there?
When Paul brings up “the tempter” and “temptation”, he’s not referring to sin
The temptation he means is the temptation to avoid/escape suffering
If that was the route they took, then all his work there would have been “in vain”
This concern for their spiritual life is why Paul sent Timothy back

Application: Suffering is part of the Christian life. But we can fall into the habit of dealing with suffering alone. God does call us to endure, but he doesn’t ask us to suffer alone. Whenever Paul talks about suffering in his letters (which he does frequently), he always adds encouragement as well. As Christ’s body, we share each other’s sufferings, and by encouraging each other, we help bear the burdens that our brothers and sisters are carrying. We help keep sufferings from becoming temptations to fall away from the faith by our encouragement.

Prayer: Almighty God, help us to notice the ones in our lives who are discouraged and suffering. Help us to comfort them, as we help bear their burdens and make them lighter. In Jesus’ name, Amen.