

FPFWC Christian Development



Eternal Hope

August 2024

Summer Quarter

August 3, 2024

Lesson #1 - The Word of God

SCRIPTURE TEXT – 1 Thessalonians 2:13 - 3:5

ICE BREAKER –

1. Why must we respond to God's word and not just hear it?
2. How do you find hope and joy in the midst of difficult circumstances? How can you be a source of hope to other believers?

Key Verse – “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.—1 Thessalonians 2:13

LESSON BACKGROUND

Because it was written around AD 51, the epistle we call 1 Thessalonians was probably the first of the New Testament's 27 books to be written. Although the four Gospels detail earlier events, most research agrees that those four were not written until the AD 60s and later.

Thessalonica was (and is) a Macedonian port city where Paul founded a church during his second missionary journey. His visit was quite controversial (Acts 17:1–9). The commotion Paul stirred was so intense that he had to escape by night (17:10). That was not the first time he had had to do so (9:23–25), nor would it be the last (23:31).

The city was on an important trade route and prospered as a result. Those of Greek, Roman, and Jewish heritage constituted its population. Paul and Silas had entered the synagogue in Thessalonica and argued from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. They ultimately persuaded some Jews and many Gentiles (Acts 17:1–4). Other Jews in the city became envious of Paul and Silas 'success. They persuaded the governing authorities to persecute the residents who believed in Christ. While the church in Thessalonica grew, it continued to face challenges in the form of persecution (1 Thessalonians 2:14; 3:3–4). Paul wrote this letter to comfort and encourage the Thessalonian believers in their trials.

LESSON COMMENTARY –

1. The Word Shaped These Believers (2:13)

2:13. Again Paul offered thanks to God for the Thessalonians' reception of the gospel. The Thessalonians had **heard** a word (verbally and audibly) preached by Paul and his companions (**from us**), a word from human agents (**the word of men**), but they heard it as something much more. It was **the word of God** that Paul preached when he preached the gospel (cf. 2:2, 8, 9; cf. Ac 8:14; 1Co 15:1–3), indicating that he viewed at least some of his teaching as inspired by God. And so it was the **word of God** the Thessalonians **received** (*paralabontes*, objectively perceived), **accepted** (*edexasthe*, inwardly welcomed, took to heart), and believed. This was not because of their own wisdom or powers of perception. The self-authenticating Word of God had performed its work of convicting and convincing them of the truth of Paul's message (cf. 1Co 2:4–5; Col 1:6). "The verb rendered **performs its work** means to work effectively, efficiently, and productively on a supernatural (divine) level (cf. 1 Cor. 12:6; Php 2:13" (MacArthur, *Thessalonians*, 58).

2. The Word Condemns Unbelievers (2:14–16)

2:14–16. But the same message that had transformed the Thessalonians was opposed by the world, and Paul noted that the Thessalonians had also experienced opposition. Again (cf. 1:6) they had become **imitators** of the original Jewish churches in Judea in how they had been persecuted. Just as Jewish believers of Judea had experienced opposition from their own people, the Jewish religious leadership, the Thessalonians had been opposed by their **own countrymen**. However, unlike the **Lord Jesus and the prophets**, they had not yet suffered martyrdom.

Some have alleged that Paul here holds "an unacceptable anti-Semitic position" (Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the 1st and 2nd Epistles to the Thessalonians*, HNTC [New York: Harper and Row, 1987], 122). In light of Paul's love and concern for his own people (Rm 9:1–3), that is unlikely. Rather, Paul's reference to **the Jews** does not refer to the entire nation but rather to the religious leadership of the Jewish people. That is because, first, Paul referred to an intra-ethnic conflict, with the Jewish leaders opposing Jewish believers in Judea as Gentiles opposed the Thessalonians. As such, Paul could not be referring to all Jews. Second, the sins Paul said the Jews committed are limited in the Gospels to those of the Jewish leaders, not the entire nation. For example, the Jewish leaders plotted Jesus' death (Jn 11:47–53), accused him before Pilate (Lk 23:2) and Herod (v. 10), and incited the crowd (Mt 27:20; Mk 15:11). Third, here Paul was describing the same sins found in the parable of the vine-growers (Mt 21:33–46) at the end of which the Jewish leaders acknowledged that Jesus was speaking of them and not the entire nation. (For a full discussion, see "Was Paul Anti-Semitic? Revisiting 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165 [January–March 2008]: 75–84). Paul noted that the Jewish leaders were **not pleasing to God**, that they were **hostile to all men**, that they were **hindering** the preaching of the gospel of salvation, and that they were in danger of the **wrath** of judgment

for their sins. The reason for pointing this out to the Thessalonians was that this was also true of the Gentile leaders who persecuted them.

IV. Paul's Personal Concern for the Thessalonians (2:17–3:13)

A. Paul's Separation from Them (2:17–20)

2:17–18. Paul expressed a personal desire to see the Thessalonians (**I, Paul**) with a sense of urgency and sincerity. His forced and physical separation (**taken away**) only increased his **great desire** to be with them in more than **spirit**. He wanted to see them “face to face.” This desire had been frustrated, in some manner not indicated, by **Satan**. **Hindered** is a military term and indicates the placing of an obstacle or impediment to an army's movement. The subtle alert to the real spiritual opposition Christians face is not to be missed.

2:19–20. Paul expressed his affection for the Thessalonians with an eschatological twist as he elaborated on why he was so affectionate toward them. It was because they were a cause of his future **hope**, the ultimate source of his present **joy**, and the basis for his expectation of reward—his **crown** (a victor's wreath, cf. 1Co 9:25). All of this will be fully realized **in the presence** of the **Lord Jesus** at the time of **His coming** when believers will be reunited and rewards distributed (at the “judgment seat” of Christ, cf. 2Co 5:10; for more on rewards, see Mt 6:1; 24:45–47; 25:19–23). **Coming** (*parousia*, “to be present”) is a term used to refer to specific aspects of the Lord's return (cf. 1Th 4:15) or to the broader, multifaceted event associated with the beginning of the day of the Lord (cf. Mt 24:37; Rv 19:11–20:6). “In addition to the present verse, this epistle uses *parousia* three other times to denote the Rapture (1Th 3:13; 4:15; 5:23)” (MacArthur, *Thessalonians*, 74). On the referent for the word **coming**, Robert L. Thomas writes, “The complexity of the term *parousia* demands that it include an extended visit as well as the arrival initiating that visit. This is provided for adequately in the rarer meaning of *parousia*, ‘presence’ (cf. 1Co 16:17; 2Co 10:10; Php 2:12). Included in this visit is an evaluation of the saints (cf. 1Th 2:19; 5:23), which is the aspect in view here in 1Th 3:13. This judgment cannot be completely dissociated from Christ's coming in the air (4:15–17), because this advent marks its initiation. Yet it must be conceived of as a session in heaven in some measure separate from the arrival itself” (Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” in EBC, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978], 269).

B. Paul's Sacrifice for Them: Sending Timothy (3:1–5)

3:1–5. Paul's concern for the Thessalonians made the separation intolerable. He **could endure it no longer**, and this led to Timothy's mission (**we sent Timothy**) to **strengthen** and **encourage** them in their faith. This mission was self-sacrificial, as Paul was **left behind at Athens alone** (3:1b). It indicated again Paul's deep affection for the Thessalonians, and it showed that he was willing to

be inconvenienced for others. The mission also indicated that Timothy, Paul's **brother and God's fellow worker** (a unique title), was just the sort of fellow who was willing to be sent and serve, according to Php 2:19–24. This mission was undertaken because Paul knew that persecution could be disturbing and potentially destructive, even as it was inevitable. He had already prepared them **in advance**. Paul was not suggesting that they could lose their salvation when he feared that his **labor would be in vain** (“empty,” “void,” “to no purpose”), nor did he think that God's Word would prove to be “in vain” (cf. Is 55:11). He was concerned that some who had made a profession would be proven to be “false brethren,” and that they would give up their professed faith because of persecution.

LESSON NUGGET – The Thessalonians had an eagerness and appetite for the word of God and that helped them to grow (Jeremiah 15:16; 1 Peter 2:2). When we hear God's word, we must also eagerly welcome it and put it to work immediately.

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary