

A Study of 1 Thessalonians



In the previous lesson Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians to describe his ministry among them. Evangelism had taken place in spite of great opposition, with the purest of motives and methods, undergirded by love and hard work. The efforts of the missionaries were in no way focused on personal gain, but only on the concern for the salvation of those in Thessalonica.

In this lesson we will see the power of the gospel and the persecution a follower of Christ can expect because of the gospel.

Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Powerful Work of the Gospel (2:13)

Thessalonica was a pagan city and the new converts accepted the new message of the gospel readily. Paul thanked God “constantly” for their faith. Just as we learned in lesson 1, Paul prayed continuously and comprehensively for every Christian.

Here Paul is thankful for the way in which The Christians in Thessalonica received the word of God. They received it for exactly what it was: the word of God and not the word of men.

1. What is meant by the “word of men?”
2. Why would anyone accept a man’s word instead of God’s word?



The Hebrew writer describes God’s word as “living” and “active.” Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Paul witnessed the continuous activity of God’s word amongst the Thessalonians. The word was not received and forgotten, nor did it come to their hearts and accomplish a work in a one time event. The word of God constantly is at work in the hearts of believers to mold, rebuke, instruct, challenge, and encourage them.

3. How have you seen God’s word active within your own life as a Christian?
4. Compare 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and Romans 10:17. What do you learn about the receiving of God’s word and faith?

To evidence of the working of the word of God, Paul sees the same faith in the Thessalonian Christians that he had witnessed in the Judean Christians.

The Expectation of Suffering (2:14-16)

The Thessalonian Christians were not just imitators of the faith of the churches in Judea, they also experienced the same type of persecution. The word “church” can be used to refer to all Christians who together make up one church. Jesus said, “I will build my church”¹ using the singular to show that he has only one universal church made up of every Christian. The word can also be used in the plural form as it is here to refer to multiple individual congregations.²



While every Christian in every congregation may not experience the level of persecution faced by the first century Christians in Judea or Thessalonica, the church has been persecuted through every century of its existence.

5. What is the definition of “suffering” as it is used in verses 14-16 ?

6. What is the significance of the phrase “churches of God in Christ Jesus?”

The Christians in Thessalonica experienced persecution from the Gentiles who were stirred up by Jews who opposed the gospel (Acts 17:5-10). The persecution of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 7, 12) forced the church to scatter. This is the only New Testament “reference to the persecution of other congregations in the Roman province of Judea.”³

The Jews killed Jesus (by accusing him before the Roman officials and calling for his crucifixion) and many prophets and drove Christians from Jerusalem.

7. How did the persecutors “displease God and oppose all mankind?”

The Jews worked to hinder gospel preachers from evangelising the Gentiles. They could not fathom that God would be interested in the Gentiles and they opposed any who would preach to them. Through their actions, the Jews were multiplying the punishment they would receive.

¹ Matthew 16:18

² See also Romans 16:16.

³ Smith, James E. *Teacher’s Commentary: Eschatological Epistles, 1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Lulu, 2011. p. 37.

The “wrath” that “has come upon them at last” may refer to an event that has already happened or to a future event that is certain because God has said it will be so. In this way future events can be referred to in present or past tense.

The wrath spoken of in verse 16 may refer to the Judean famine of A.D. 44-47 which was just past, the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews in A.D. 70 which was some twenty years in the future, or the final judgment.

The Relationship of an Evangelist to God’s People (2:17-20)

Paul expresses great emotion in verses 17-20. He was continuously thankful for the work of the gospel in the lives of the Thessalonian Christians. His ministry in Thessalonica was cut short because of the activity of those opposed to the gospel.

Paul did not leave the Thessalonian Christians voluntarily, he was “torn away” indicating a painful forced separation. The word translated as “torn away”⁴ comes from the same root word as “orphan.” Paul sees himself as their spiritual father who was forced to leave these young Christians as orphans against his will. Imagine the pain of being forcefully separated from you children.



This involuntary separation was hoped to be a short one and while we have no specific reference of Paul ever visiting Thessalonica again we do know that at the end of his third missionary journey he traveled through Macedonia on his way to Corinth. The route he followed would have taken him through Thessalonica.

While Paul was physically separated from these young Christians they were still present with him in his heart.

8. Why was it important to Paul to see the Thessalonian Christians “face to face” when he could receive news of them from Timothy, communicate by letter, and remember them daily in prayer?

9. What was keeping Paul from visiting the Christians in Thessalonica according to verse 18?

We do not know how Satan prevented Paul from seeing the Thessalonians. It could have been the ongoing persecution, personal circumstances in Paul’s life such as an illness, or orders from the governing authorities. Whatever stopped Paul from his desired visits the ultimate culprit was Satan himself.

10. Does Satan still alter the plans of Christian workers? If so, how?

⁴ *aporphanisthentes*

11. How does Paul describe the Thessalonian Christians in verses 19-20?

12. In what way can those we lead to Christ be described as “a crown of boasting before the Lord at his coming?”⁵

Paul rejoices in the power of the gospel to change lives. This power does not spring from the word of men, but from the living and abiding word of God. Those who receive the gospel can live with the expectation of suffering and persecution. This persecution was evident in the first century churches and was experienced by the prophets and by Jesus himself.

Christians share the most important relationship possible and because of this relationship Christians love one another deeply. Our foe, Satan, is active in his attempt to hinder the expansion of the Lord’s kingdom and will do whatever he is able to thwart the gospel.

Though Christians may be physically separated they share a deep love for one another. This is especially true of those a Christian leads to Christ. They are our “hope,” “joy,” “glory,” and “crown of boasting before the Lord.” We look forward to the Second Coming of Christ, and the eternal kingdom, where we might present to Christ all those we have helped lead to him through the proclamation of his powerful and life changing word.

⁵ See also Philippians 4:1, 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:4, and Revelation 2:10