

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes: 1 Thessalonians Chapters 1-2

8/27/14

Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' Faith - Verses 1 -10

1:1 Paul and his companions probably arrived in Thessalonica in the early summer of A.D. 50. They planted the first Christian church in that city, but had to leave in a hurry because their lives were threatened (Acts 17:1-10). At the first opportunity, probably when he stopped at Corinth, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the new believers were doing. Timothy returned to Paul with good news: The Christians in Thessalonica were remaining firm in the faith and were unified. But the Thessalonians did have some questions about their new faith. Paul had not had time to answer all their questions during his brief visit, and in the meantime, other questions had arisen. So Paul wrote this letter to answer their questions and to commend them on their faithfulness to Christ.

1:1 Thessalonica was the capital and largest city (about 200,000 population) of the Roman province of Macedonia. The most important Roman highway (the Egnatian Way)— extending from Rome all the way to the Orient—went through Thessalonica. This highway, along with the city's thriving seaport, made Thessalonica one of the wealthiest and most flourishing trade centers in the Roman Empire. Recognized as a free city, Thessalonica was allowed self-rule and was exempted from most of the restrictions placed by Rome on other cities in the empire. With its international flavor, however, came many pagan religions and cultural influences that challenged the faith of the young Christians there.

1:3 The Thessalonians had stood firm when they were persecuted (1:6; 3:1-4, 7-8). Paul commended these young Christians for their work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, and endurance inspired by hope. These characteristics are the marks of effective Christians in any age.

1:4 Paul reminded the Thessalonians of their status as God's "chosen" ones. Very few issues cause more confusion and even arguments among Christians than the issue of election (being chosen by God). It is difficult to simultaneously embrace God's sovereignty in choosing us and our human responsibility in choosing to follow him. Even though we may not be able to completely comprehend how these two truths can coexist, we can say the following: Being chosen comes from the heart of God (not our minds), should be an incentive to please God (not ignore him), and should give birth to gratitude (not complacency). Human responsibility requires that we actively confess Christ as Lord, focus on living to please him, and share the gospel with others. God's choice of us energizes us to obey and to serve. Our choice of God challenges us to build lives worthy of him. As you consider God's divine selection of you, how do you respond?

1:5 The gospel came "with power"; it had a powerful effect on the Thessalonians. Whenever the Bible is heard and obeyed, lives are changed! Christianity is more than a collection of interesting facts; it is the power of God to everyone who believes. What has God's power done in your life since you first believed?

The Holy Spirit changes people when they believe the gospel. When we tell others about Christ, we must depend on the Holy Spirit to open their eyes and convince them that they need salvation. God's power—not our cleverness or persuasion—changes people. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, our words are meaningless. The Holy Spirit not only convicts people of sin but also assures them of the truth of the gospel. The Thessalonians had seen that what Paul, Silas, and Timothy were preaching was true because these men had lived it. Does your life confirm or contradict what you say you believe?

1:6 The message of salvation, though welcomed with great joy, brought the Thessalonians severe suffering because it led to persecution from both Jews and Gentiles (3:2-4; Acts 17:5). Many believers today think that pain is the exception in the Christian life. When suffering occurs, they say, "Why me?" They feel as though God deserted them, or perhaps they accuse him of not being as dependable as they thought he should be. In reality, the world is sinful, so even believers suffer. God allows some Christians to become martyrs for the faith, and he allows others to survive persecution. Rather than asking, "Why me?" we should ask, "Why not me?" Our faith and the values of this world are on a collision course. If we expect pain and suffering to come, we will not be shocked when they occur. We can take comfort in knowing that Jesus also suffered. He understands our fears, our weaknesses, and our disappointments (Hebrews 2:16-18; 4:14-16). He promised never to leave us (Matthew 28:18-20), and he intercedes on our behalf (Hebrews 7:24-25). In times of pain, persecution, or suffering, trust confidently in Christ.

1:9-10 All of us should respond to the gospel as the Thessalonians did: Turn to God, serve God, and wait for the return of his Son, Christ, from heaven. We should turn from sin to God because Christ is coming to judge the earth. We should be fervent in our service because we have little time before Christ returns. We should be prepared for Christ to return because we don't know when he will come.

1:10 Paul emphasized Christ's second coming throughout this book. Because the Thessalonian church was being persecuted, Paul encouraged them to look forward to the deliverance that Christ would bring. A believer's hope is in the return of Jesus, our great God and Savior (Titus 2:13). Our perspective on life remains incomplete without this hope. Just as surely as Christ was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, he will return (Acts 1:11).

Bible Study Notes: Chapter 2

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica - Verses 1-16

2:1-2 "Our visit to you" refers to Paul's first visit to Thessalonica recorded in Acts 17:1-9. The Thessalonians knew that Paul had been imprisoned in Philippi just prior to coming to Thessalonica (see Acts 16:11-17:1). Fear of imprisonment did not keep Paul from preaching the gospel. If God wants us to do something, he will give us the strength and courage to boldly speak out for him despite any obstacles that may come our way. Boldness is not reckless impulsiveness. Boldness requires courage to press through fears and do what is right. How can we be more bold? Like the apostles, we need to pray for that kind of courage. To gain boldness, you can pray for the Holy Spirit's power, look

for opportunities to talk about Christ, and start right where you are being bolder in even small ways.

2:3 This pointed statement may be a response to accusations from the Jewish leaders who had stirred up the crowds (Acts 17:5). Paul did not seek money, fame, or popularity by sharing the gospel. He demonstrated the sincerity of his motives by showing that he and Silas had suffered for sharing the gospel in Philippi. People become involved in ministry for a variety of reasons, not all of them good or pure. When their bad motives are exposed, all of Christ's work suffers. When you get involved in ministry, do so out of love for Christ and others.

2:4-8 In trying to persuade people, we may be tempted to alter our position just enough to make our message more palatable or to use flattery or praise. Paul never changed his message to make it more acceptable, but he did tailor his methods to each audience. Although our presentation must be altered to be appropriate to the situation, the truth of the gospel must never be compromised.

2:5 It's disgusting to hear a person "butter up" someone else. Flattery is phony, and it covers up a person's real intentions. Christians should not be flatterers. Those who proclaim God's truth have a special responsibility to be honest. Are you honest and straightforward in your words and actions? Or do you tell people what they want to hear in order to get what you want or to get ahead?

2:6-8 When Paul was with the Thessalonians, he didn't flatter them, seek their praise, or become a burden to them. He and Silas completely focused their efforts on presenting God's message of salvation to the Thessalonians. This was important! The Thessalonian believers had their lives changed by God, not Paul; it was Christ's message they believed, not Paul's. When we witness for Christ, our focus should not be on the impressions we make. As true ministers of Christ, we should point to him, not to ourselves.

2:7 That Paul and his companions "were like children" among the Thessalonians does not mean they were immature or untrained. Rather, Paul was making the point that, like children, they were honest, straightforward, and without guile in their presentation of the gospel and of their lives.

2:9 Although Paul had the right to receive financial support from the people he taught, he supported himself as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3) so that he wouldn't be a burden to the new Thessalonian believers.

2:11 No loving father would neglect the safety of his children, allowing them to walk into circumstances that might be harmful or fatal. In the same way, we must take new believers under our wing until they are mature enough to stand firm in their faith. We must help new Christians become strong enough to influence others for the sake of the gospel.

2:12 By his words and example, Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to live in such a way that would be worthy of God. Is there anything about your daily life that would embarrass God? What do people think of God from watching you?

2:13 Paul said that the word of God continued to work in the believers' lives. Paul knew that God's words are not mere sermons or documents but a real source of transforming power. This Bible you hold in your hands is full of real and living power. Its words are transforming lives all over the world every day. Read it. Encourage fellow believers to read it. Encourage non-Christian friends to read it. All who do so, truly seeking to learn, will be touched by its power. They will never be the same.

2:14 Just as the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were persecuted by other Jews, so the Gentile Christians in Thessalonica were persecuted by their fellow Gentiles. Persecution is discouraging, especially when it comes from your own people. When you take a stand for Christ, you may face opposition, disapproval, and ridicule from your neighbors, friends, and even family members. When Paul refers to the Jews, he is talking about certain Jews who opposed his preaching of the gospel. He does not mean all Jews. Many of Paul's converts were Jewish. Paul himself was a Jew (2 Corinthians 11:22).

2:15 Having believed the gospel and accepted new life in Christ, apparently many Thessalonians thought that they would be protected from death until Christ returned. Then, when believers began to die under persecution, some Thessalonian Christians started to question their faith. Many of Paul's comments throughout this letter were addressed to these people, as he explained what happens when believers die (see 4:13-18).

2:15-16 Why were so many Jews opposed to Christianity? (1) Although the Jewish religion had been declared legal by the Roman government, it still had a tenuous relationship with the government. At this time, Christianity was viewed as a sect of Judaism. The Jews were afraid that reprisals leveled against the Christians might be expanded to include them. (2) The Jewish leaders thought Jesus was a false prophet, and they didn't want his teachings to spread. (3) The leaders feared that if many Jews were drawn away, their own political position might be weakened. (4) Jews were proud of their special status as God's chosen people and resented the fact that Gentiles could be full members within the Christian church.

Paul's Longing to See the Thessalonians - Verses 17-20

2:18 Satan is real. He is called "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4) and "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). We don't know exactly what hindered Paul from returning to Thessalonica—opposition, illness, travel complications, or a direct attack by Satan—but Satan worked in some way to keep him away. Many of the difficulties that prevent us from accomplishing God's work can be attributed to Satan (see Ephesians 6:12).

2:20 The ultimate reward for Paul's ministry was not money, prestige, or fame, but new believers whose lives had been changed by God through the preaching of the gospel. This was why he longed to see them. No matter what ministry God has given to you, your highest reward and greatest joy should be those who come to believe in Christ and are growing in him.