

ELIM ABERYSTWYTH, 2024

# STAND FIRM

Learning from the Letters to the  
Church of the Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 2





Video

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# 1 Thessalonians

What is the book of 1 Thessalonians about in the Bible? Watch as we explain its major themes and gain a deeper understanding of its place in the biblical story.



PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY



# Context

- The letter is most likely the earliest example we have of The Apostle Paul's writing
- Paul had been (with Silas) to Thessalonica during his second missionary journey
- Thessalonica (now Thessaloniki) was a thriving port city in northern Greece



MACEDONIA

PHILIPPI

TH

THESSALONICA

BEREA

ATHENS

CORINTH

AEGEAN SEA

CRETE



# Thessaloniki

GREECE



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# Context

- They were not on holiday!
- They arrived from Phillipi where they had been beaten, imprisoned and miraculously set free
- Within a few weeks they had established a group of Jesus followers which included 'some Jews... a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women' (See Acts 17)



# Context

- Jealous members of the synagogue started a riot accusing the Christ followers of defying Caesar and his decrees
- The believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea under the cover of night
- The Word of God thrived in Berea and so some of those Jews from Thessalonica persecuted them again!



**PAUL KNEW AND LOVED  
THIS GROUP OF NEW  
BELIEVERS PERSONALLY**

**HE WROTE TO ENCOURAGE  
AND CHALLENGE THEM TO:**

- © **STAND FIRM IN THE FACE  
OF PERSECUTION,  
CULTURAL ANTAGONISM  
AND RELIGIOUS  
JEALOUSY**
- © **CONTINUE SEEKING TO  
LIVE WHOLLY HOLY LIVES**
- © **HOLD ON TO THE HOPE  
OF CHRIST'S RETURN  
AND FUTURE KINGDOM**

**THE REALITY OF THESE ARE  
AS TRUE FOR US TODAY AS  
THEY WERE IN THE FIRST  
CENTURY ANO DOMINI**



# Previously...

- **1 Thess 1**

- Paul affirmed them, celebrating how they had turned to the one true God by the work of the Spirit
- Celebrated how their hospitality, their work (faith), patience (hope) and toil (love) had had a resounding impact
- Reminded them of the future hope in Jesus







**You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results.**  
**2 We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.**



**3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.**



# For the Gospel of God

- Paul is responding to some questioning his motives and reaffirming the legitimacy and power of their message
- Why would they have persevered to preach this message in Thessalonica if doing so would bring trouble upon them?
- Because The Gospel is true and it had borne good and lasting fruit here



# For the Gospel of God

- Their motives were pure - there was no material gain being made here
- Thessalonica was a busy port city - they were accustomed to sales people, tricksters and philosophers
- Approved by God and entrusted with the gospel - this is true of you too!



**THEY  
WANTED TO  
PLEASE GOD -  
WHO TESTS  
OUR HEARTS -  
DO WE WANT  
TO PLEASE  
PEOPLE OR  
GOD?**



**5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed - God is our witness. 6 We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. 7 Instead, we were like young children among you.**



# For the Gospel of God

- There was no flattery or greed in their message or their method
- Can we say the same of much of what we see today?
- They could have made much of their 'status' as apostles but they were humble and innocent - like children



**Just as a nursing  
mother cares for  
her children, & so  
we cared for you.  
Because we loved  
you so much, we  
were delighted to  
share with you  
not only the  
gospel of God  
but our lives as  
well.**

**1 THESSALONIANS 2**



# For the Gospel of God

- Here we get a sense of the depth of love and care Paul had for them
- After likening themselves to children he now uses imagery of his maternal style love for them
- In the space of the month they spent with them, they had 'shared their lives' with them



**ARE WE  
WILLING TO  
SHARE OUR  
LIVES?**

**IF NOT, DOES  
SOMETHING  
NEED TO  
CHANGE?**



**9 Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.**



# For the Gospel of God

- Paul was a hardworking man - we know from elsewhere that he was a tent maker
- Whoever was stirring up questions about their motives must have failed to see the work they did!
- Paul is not boasting in his own goodness - his boasts in Christ (Gal 6:14)



**WHAT  
LENGTHS  
WILL WE GO  
TO IN ORDER  
TO GIVE  
PEOPLE THE  
GIFT OF THE  
GOSPEL?**



**11 For you know  
that we dealt with  
each of you as a  
father deals with  
his own children,  
12 encouraging,  
comforting and  
urging you to live  
lives worthy of  
God, who calls you  
into his kingdom  
and glory.**



# For the Gospel of God

- The imagery moves over to a (good) father and his children
- Encouraging, comforting and urging... not judging, punishing and forcing
- The goal was 'lives worthy of God'



**WHO DO WE  
ALLOW TO  
SPEAK INTO  
OUR LIVES  
TO HELP US  
LIVE LIVES  
WORTHY OF  
GOD?**



**WHO ARE YOU  
ENCOURAGING,  
COMFORTING  
AND/OR  
URGING TO  
HELP THEM  
LIVE LIVES  
WORTHY OF  
GOD?**



**13 And we also  
thank God  
continually  
because, when you  
received the word  
of God, which you  
heard from us, you  
accepted it not as a  
human word, but  
as it actually is, the  
word of God, which  
is indeed at work in  
you who believe.**



**14 For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out.**



# For the Gospel of God

- And here he goes...  
deliberately comforting  
and encouraging these  
people once again!
- He helps them to relate  
their challenges to those  
of the church in Judea  
and to the suffering of  
Christ - persecution from  
their own people
- Would are willing to face?



**They displease God  
and are hostile to  
everyone 16 in  
their effort to keep  
us from speaking  
to the Gentiles so  
that they may be  
saved. In this way  
they always heap  
up their sins to the  
limit. The wrath of  
God has come  
upon them at last.**



# For the Gospel of God

- We must avoid religious or cultural superiority - the gospel is for everyone and anyone... even you and me!
- The Judean church had suffered at the hands of their own people who were rejecting Christ
- God is patient and merciful but rejecting Him cannot go on forever!



"God's anger is never capricious or malevolent; when humans reject him and behave in ways that undermine his wise and generous designs for them the world, he does not instantly punish, but allows space for **repentance**. If this does not happen, though, wickedness builds up, sin accumulates, until the point where God must say 'enough' and bring things to an end."



# For the Gospel of God

- The temple was destroyed in AD70
- It is likely Paul would have considered this as being God's judgement if he were still alive at the time (NT Wright)
- Opposition and suffering are not to lead us to the conclusion that we are on the wrong track or that God is failing



**THE NEW  
TESTAMENT GIVES  
US REGULAR  
INSIGHT INTO THE  
PRIVILEGE OF  
SUFFERING FOR  
CHRIST, AS IF WE  
ARE SUFFERING  
WITH HIM, AND  
THE PERSPECTIVE  
OF HOW WE CAN  
VALUE THIS IN HIS  
ETERNAL KINGDOM**



**17 But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. 18 For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way.**



# For the Gospel of God

- Paul was genuinely desperate to see them and senses (as with the Roman church) a darker disruptive force at work
- But we know God's plans are greater than we can understand and He can use every situation
- Paul being unable to see them meant we have his letter(s) to read today!



**19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?**  
**20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy.**



**THE PEOPLE  
WE INVEST  
THE GOSPEL  
AND THE  
KINGDOM OF  
GOD INTO  
ARE OUR  
ONLY TRUE  
ETERNAL  
TREASURE**



"At the heart of it all is the approval, not of humans, but of God. Again and again in this passage Paul speaks of God: He was bold in God, preached the gospel of God, he had been approved or validated by God, he was aiming simply to please God and God was his witness that he was not exercising this ministry in secret pursuit of greed."



**LORD, PLEASE HELP ME  
OVERCOME TEMPTATION  
TO PLEASE PEOPLE  
RATHER THAN GOD**

**LORD, PLEASE HELP ME  
OPEN UP MY LIFE SO  
OTHERS MAY HELP ME  
LIVE A LIFE WORTHY OF  
GOD AND I MAY HELP  
OTHERS TO KNOW YOU**

**LORD, PLEASE HELP ME  
TO GO THE EXTRA MILE  
IN ORDER TO SHARE THE  
HOPE OF THE GOSPEL  
WITH OTHERS**