

# 1 Thessalonians – Lesson 5

## The Ministry in Thessalonica – Part 1

### Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

1. Review your notes from the last three lessons over chapter 1. What do you think Paul was *most grateful for* in the lives of the Thessalonians? How is it true of *you*?

I believe that Paul was *most* thankful for the continuing, consistent faith of the Thessalonians, that had borne up in much affliction and had been visible in their reputation for proclaiming the truth of the gospel of the risen Christ throughout the entire world. They had embraced the message Paul had delivered to them, and they had continued to believe it, even after he was gone. I pray that this is true in my own life, as well: that others see my faith (imperfectly, nonetheless) and are grateful for someone to emulate along those lines.

2. (a) What does Paul mean in 2:1 that the missionary team's arrival in Thessalonica was "*not in vain*?"

When Paul arrived after his very tumultuous visit to Philippi, he found the city and people of Thessalonica welcoming, at least at first. He preached to the Jews in the synagogue for a period of weeks and a number of people believed. The church was planted there amongst a few early converts, so the trip to the city was not "in vain"; it produced fruit that lasted, unlike other cities that Paul would visit (e.g., Athens) where the gospel did not take hold.

- (b) From Acts 16:11-40, list some of the "*shameful treatment*" Paul and Silas received at Philippi.

Luke records a number of specific mistreatments that Paul and Silas received at Philippi: 1) there was no Jewish gathering in which to gather; Paul and Silas had to go down to the river to join some women who would gather there (note: although not specifically *shameful*, it would have been disappointing to Paul not to have Jewish brothers with which to debate); 2) the constant "attack" by the demon-possessed slave girl, mocking Paul and Silas, to the point where Paul becomes annoyed and casts the demon from the girl; 3) the owners of the girl (who used her for profit) dragged Paul and Silas before the rulers of the city; 4) Paul and Silas beaten by the civil authorities for practices deemed "inconsistent" with the customs of the city; 5) Paul and Silas imprisoned and shackled as common criminals; and 6) the civil magistrates escorting Paul and Silas from the city after apologizing for treating them as non-citizens.

- (c) How would the events at Philippi give Paul and Silas "*boldness*" to preach at Thessalonica (2:2)?

The treatment that Paul and Silas received at Philippi would give them a sense of boldness in preaching at Thessalonica for the following reasons: 1) their status as Roman citizens would probably precede them into Thessalonica, and they would feel a sense of "safety" in knowing that the magistrates there would think twice about arresting them as such; 2) the experience in Philippi would embolden them to speak because, after all, what *worse* could they experience here; already having been beaten and imprisoned for preaching, what's the worst that could happen in the next town?; and 3) the persecution that they endured would do the opposite in their heart and mind than what was *intended* by the persecutors: it would embolden them to speak because they would now be more convinced than ever that their message was divinely inspired and true; being supernaturally freed from the prison would convince them that their message was from the Living God, and that Christ was watching over them.

3. (a) From 2:3-7, list the *wrong* methods or motives that Paul and his team *repudiated* in preaching the gospel to the Thessalonians. How are these often present in the church *today*?

Paul eschewed the following ways of preaching in Thessalonica: 1) with error or impurity – bringing a message that was *purposely* false in order to win converts; 2) with any attempt to deceive – trying to win them over with deceptions; 3) not to please men – trying to sound and act in ways that would be pleasing to ordinary, reprobate people; 4) not with flattery – overt forms of emotionalism or attachment designed to win people over to your case; 5) not with a pretext of greed – preaching in order to enhance oneself financially; and 6) not to attain personal glory – preaching so that the preacher looks better than the subject of the material. There is much “preaching” today that uses all of these methods to advance the vision of the preacher: 1) to simply preach what is untrue in order to win a following (i.e., making unreasonable promises in the message); 2) deceiving weak and gullible people by acting as an “expert” in a subject that you clearly do not grasp, nor can your audience; 3) trying to please men so that they “like” you and idolize you rather than Christ (see 3b below); 4) using flattery, attaching forms of emotionalism to the gospel message that wins converts to false hopes; 5) being greedy by using the preaching as a means to line your pockets from gullible people, and 6) making yourself glorious in the hearts of those to whom you preach, taking the focus off of Christ and making it about you.

(b) In 2:4, what does it mean “to please man” versus “to please God?” List some ways that the proclamation of the gospel can be used to please man rather than please God.

To please man is to preach in such a way that the message becomes all about *the audience* rather than about Christ. It is to preach a message that is personally “relevant” or “helpful”; it is to preach so that reprobate men, normally uninterested in the gospel, find something in it that is “appealing” to them so that the preacher becomes important or valuable or wealthy from it. To preach to please God is to be *his* messenger; to speak on *his* behalf regardless of how the message is accepted. It is to assume that the heart of the listener is hard and unwilling, but to preach *truth* under the power of the Spirit, and to allow the Spirit to do with that message what comes. Pleasing man includes “soul winning” that is only interested in numbers; getting people to make a shallow profession of faith, and then using that *statistically* to show that you are a great preacher or that the church is a great place.

(c) What does Paul list as his *primary motivation* in proclaiming the gospel in Thessalonica?

Paul’s primary motivation is found in v. 4: being entrusted with the gospel, Paul has no other choice but to preach that message everywhere he goes. Because of his *direct* encounter with Christ, and the massive impact to his worldview that encounter had, Paul is deeply motivated to go out and preach to others what he now knows to be true.

(d) *Explain* the analogy of 2:7 in relation to Paul and his team in Thessalonica. Does this picture *deny* the importance of being firm in the face of error? Why or why not?

Paul uses the analogy of his relationship with the Thessalonians as a mother nursing a child. It is a picture of the gentle relationship a mother has with a newborn baby: the child is *utterly* dependent upon her, so she gently provides all that the child needs. Paul insists that *this* was the way he and his team dealt with the Thessalonians: they were like newborns, unable to fend for themselves, and he had the life-giving “milk” that they needed. He gently and carefully and lovingly provided the sustenance, doing so in a way that brought them life until they could be weaned to stand on their own. This picture *does not* deny the importance of being firm; sometimes a child needs strong direction from the parent to survive; the parent cannot be *uncaring*, but must (at times) provide a firm, yet loving hand to guide the child to maturity. This is why, sometimes, Paul would need to be stern; he would need, at times, with certain people, to *debate* the subject material and make a strong case for belief in Christ. Too many today believe that confidence is the same as arrogance, but nothing could be further from the truth: to preach and teach with great confidence requires the true preacher of Christ to submit to *his* authority and *his* direction, and to trust *his* outcome with it.

4. (a) What kind of *relationship* did the missionary team have with the believers in Thessalonica, according to 2:8? How did this help to *propagate* faith among them?

Paul considered the Thessalonian believers to be very dear to him; they were “*affectionately desirous*” of the elect in Thessalonica. They truly loved those who had come to faith because they (now) shared a common faith and a common Spirit. The bond between believers is built upon the foundation of a common love for God in Christ Jesus, and this love helped the team to not only help them come to an *initial faith*, but it also helped them to *grow* in their understanding of the implications of faith in Christ as the Risen Lord.

(b) From 2:9, to what kinds of “*labor and toil*” is Paul referring? What does this imply about Paul’s *financial assumptions* and their connection to the eventual church in the city?

Paul seems to imply that his team “made their own living” while in the city, a reality that was present in much of Paul’s missionary efforts as he worked as a tentmaker. It is likely that Paul, while in the city, set up a tentmaking business in order to earn money to support himself and the team. After all, we know that he did so while in Corinth just shortly after his time in Macedonia (Acts 18:3). So, Paul did not assume that the Thessalonians were to “support” him; he acted as a bi-vocational missionary so that he would not be “beholden” to anyone else for his support (although, as he strongly notes in 1 Corinthians 9, he had a *right* to such support).

(c) From 2:10-12, what is Paul’s *justification* for his behavior? What was he attempting to *accomplish*?

Paul’s justification for his behavior was that he tried to be “holy and blameless” before them. By trying to act *consistently* with the gospel he was proclaiming, Paul believed that others would see that in him, and it would “draw” them to his message. In other words, by being consistently *Christian* in behavior, the message he preached would not seem hypocritical; his behavior would not “get in the way” of people believing his gospel.

5. *Summarize* Paul’s point in 2:1-12. Why is he *rehearsing* his time in the city? What is the lesson *for us*?

Paul is rehearsing his time in Thessalonica to demonstrate that they had believed a message that came from a source *worthy to be believed*. The missionary team had come to town with only a single motivation: to preach a message of salvation in Christ that they had received *directly* from Christ himself, and nothing *in their own behavior* got in the way of the veracity of that message. The missionary team *acted like they believed their own message*, and they preached it without hypocrisy. The point of rehearsing it was to say to the Thessalonians that they had put their faith *in the right place*; they had not been deceived, they had believed a message that was true and *demonstrably* true in the team itself. Paul is *encouraging* them in two ways: 1) know that you received a good message and have believed it, and 2) imitate us as you move forward. Don’t fall victim to *doubt*: just as we believed the truth of the Risen Christ, and demonstrated it in the way we lived, you also must do the same. Believe the word and live that word faithfully. Do not fall away.