



## 1 THESSALONIANS

# SHARING THE GOSPEL AND LIFE

## 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-20

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### MAIN IDEA

Paul told the Thessalonians to follow his example and to live worthy of the Lord even as they faced persecution for their faith.

### INTRODUCTION

*As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.*

What was your favorite part of school growing up? Did you love recess, lunch, math, English, or some other subject? Though the answer to that question may vary, one thing people rarely claim as their favorite part of school is exams. Tests days can be stressful even though they play an important role in schooling. Tests reveal how much a person has learned or grown in knowledge of a subject. No one wants to go to a doctor who has never been tested on his or her medical knowledge. Through examination a person is shown proven for advancement. Today, we study a passage where Paul wrote about being entrusted with the gospel, and he encouraged Christians to walk worthy.

- **What was your favorite part of school?**
- **How have various tests shown your readiness in given areas?**

**UNDERSTANDING**

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-5.

Paul had enemies in Thessalonica who were trying to discredit him and undermine the ministry he had established there. These enemies used Paul's abrupt departure to cast doubt about his motives and character. He responded that no one with impure motives or selfish ambitions would endure the persecution and difficulties he had dealt with boldly.

- **How do these verses remind us that all who follow Christ will face opposition?**

In that time, not unlike today, numerous religions competed for members and their leaders often had self-serving tendencies that fed their greed. Paul stressed that his message was the pure gospel of Jesus. He had no personal agenda and what he preached could be trusted as from the Lord.

- **How does our present religious context compare with Paul's time?**
- **How might someone's motives be revealed as impure, even if they proclaim the name of Jesus?**

Further, Paul stated God had approved his teaching. This idea is like approving someone as fit for service after being tested. Paul acknowledged that in preaching the pure gospel, he did not please everyone. He was focused on pleasing God and winning His approval over pleasing men or gaining their approval. Although some preach using words that flatter people and seek their approval, Paul refused to pander in that way and stayed faithful to the truth of the Word of God, even though some didn't like it.

- **Why is the message of God divisive in the world?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 2:6-12.

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he ministered to them without seeking personal gain or glory in any form. He even compared the demeanor of his team with that of a nursing mother who loves and cares more about her infant more than herself.

Lest anyone think Paul viewed ministry as a burden, he made clear that was not the case. Though he endured sacrifices for the sake of the ministry, he loved the Thessalonians so much that he was happy to do so out of his affection for them. When you love and care about someone, then the sacrifices you make on their behalf are not burdensome, as you are focused on them over yourself. Paul gave of himself seeking the gospel message to be even more well received and effective.

- **How did the way Paul lived impact the way his message was received?**

- **How does this apply to our lives today?**

Paul again pointed to his own life as an example. He wanted people to look to Jesus but felt confident that in telling them to follow his example that they would in turn be following Jesus. The way he lived among them was just and blameless. How many Christians today could say the same? Paul called them as witnesses themselves to refute the false accusations against him because they had seen the truth with their own eyes. All Christ followers should make it a goal to walk worthy of the Lord and let our lives be witnesses for our faith.

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- **Does living this way mean perfection? If not, what does it mean?**
- **What are some ways you might live that show a compelling example of following Jesus?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20.

Paul expressed how grateful he was for the way the Thessalonians had received the message of the gospel. They had welcomed it as truth from the Lord and not as man's opinion.

- **Why is it important to recognize the gospel as truth from God and not a man-made message?**

As other believers had, the Thessalonian Christians suffered persecution as they lived faithfully in light of God's truth. This was further evidence of the truth of this message as it would not be worth enduring such hardship for a lie.

- **What types of persecution do believers today face in our context and around the world?**

Paul comforted these believers with the assurance that they were not the only ones to suffer in that way and as they endured, they were pleasing the Lord. Further, God was mindful of this hardship and would not let their oppressors go unanswered. Paul affirmed his love for these believers and expressed his desire to be with them though he had been prevented. Paul encouraged them with the reminder that their hope was in

Jesus and His return. Paul also called the Thessalonians his glory and joy. As the church lives faithfully, others in the body are spurred on to faithfulness and joy also.

- **How does the return of Jesus give you hope?**
- **How does the reminder of Jesus's return enable you to face difficulty now?**

## APPLICATION

- **How does the expectation of Jesus's return affect the way that you live daily? Is there anything that needs to change?**
- **Who do we need to share the truth of the gospel with so they too can know the hope we have in Jesus?**

## PRAY

Thank God for saving you and ask for opportunities to share the hope of Christ with others. Pray for equipping to live worthy of your faith as a witness to others.

## INTRODUCTION TO 1 THESSALONIANS

Paul spent a very short time in the city of Thessalonica, but he was able to establish a church during his stay. He may have had little time to instruct the new converts, so it is not surprising that Paul wrote a letter to address some questions.

### Author

No serious objections have been made to dispute that Paul was the author of 1 Thessalonians (1:1). The greeting also mentions Silvanus and Timothy. Sometimes Paul wrote from the team perspective, but he was the primary author (2:18; 3:2).

### Background

About AD 50 the missionary team led by Paul and Silas (“Silvanus”) left Philippi and traveled westward on the Roman road known as the Via Egnatia. They proceeded toward Thessalonica—the strategic capital city of the Roman Province of Macedonia. Thessalonica was a large port city on the Aegean Sea in modern-day Greece, with a population of about two hundred thousand. The city was filled with pagan worshipers of idols, the full pantheon of Greek and Roman gods, and was well known for its emperor worship. Thessalonica was loyal to Caesar, who had granted its citizens many privileges.

### Message and Purpose

Timothy reported to Paul that although the church at Thessalonica was suffering affliction, they were holding fast to the faith. And though they had some doctrinal misunderstandings, they were laboring for the Lord out of love and patiently hoping for the return of Christ. Paul wrote to encourage the church in their faith, to remind them that sanctification was God’s will for them, and to correct misunderstandings about end-time events.

## 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-20

**2:1.** Brothers and sisters: Christians have a new spiritual family relationship based on their common faith (Mt 12:46–50).

**Notes:**

**2:2.** At Philippi Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned for casting a demon out of a slave girl. As Paul stated at that time, it was illegal to punish Roman citizens like this without a trial (Ac 16:16–40). Paul's statement also indicates that, along with Paul, Silas was a Roman citizen. In spite of great opposition, which continued into Thessalonica, the gospel of God was faithfully proclaimed.

**2:3.** Paul's motives for ministry were to proclaim truth and to please God.

**2:4–7.** Paul tried to please God in all he did and said because he was appointed by God to this task. God also continually examined Paul's heart, so he did not want to deceive his audience or try to win their approval at the expense of God's approval. Such should be the attitude of all Christians.

**2:8.** Paul's method of ministry was not only the impartation of the gospel but the sharing of his own life as well.

**2:9.** Paul preached God's gospel to the Thessalonians, not taking any financial support but working not to burden them. It was clear that Paul was not in the ministry for the money, and this helped testify to the truth of his message. Paul was a tentmaker by trade (Ac 18:3).

**2:10–12.** Having compared himself to the gentleness of a nursing mother in v. 7, Paul here compares himself to a father who encourages, comforts, and implores his children to live worthy of God. A "worthy" life was a life that was appropriate or suitable.

**2:13.** This verse introduces renewed thanksgiving for the Thessalonians, connected to 1:2. Paul thanks God because they received the message preached as the very word of God, which it was.

**2:14.** Though the Thessalonian church was founded in the midst of persecution, Paul pointed out that their sufferings were not unique. Starting with the crucifixion of Jesus and continuing into the churches of Judea, persecution was ever present in the early church. Persecution was usually initiated by hostile Jews trying to use the Roman authorities to help them. It was not until the later reign of Nero, following the great fire that burned Rome (AD 64), that the first major empire-wide persecution of Christians began as an official Roman policy.

**Notes:**

**2:15.** They refers to the Jews of v. 14. This is the only place in Paul's writings where he identified those who were responsible for Jesus's death. Prophets appears to be a reference to the OT prophets who also suffered persecution at the hands of their countrymen (Ac 7:52). The pattern is clear—rejection of the message first, then persecution of the messenger.

**2:16.** Some Jews objected to offering the message of the gospel to Gentiles (Ac 13:46–50; 14:2; 17:5, 13). The phrase filling up their sins implies that God will tolerate only a certain number of sins before His judgment falls.

**2:17–18.** The intensity of Paul's desire to see the Thessalonians again is evident by these emphatic descriptions: greatly desired ... made every effort ... even I, Paul, time and again. The phrase Satan hindered us probably refers to the persecution Paul was experiencing or possibly an illness (2Co 12:7). Perhaps the security bond that Jason gave to the city officials to calm things down after persecution broke out in Thessalonica ensured that Paul himself would not return. In any case the Thessalonian believers had to send Paul and Silas quickly away at night (Ac 17:8–10). The name Satan means "adversary," as one who is opposed to God, His plan, and His people.

**2:19–20.** Paul viewed the Thessalonian church as his crown of boasting, which would be evident at Jesus's coming. The reference to a "crown" carries the image of a laurel wreath worn on the head in reward for victory at a Greek athletic contest.