

# Study 3: 1st Thessalonians Chapter 2

## **Introduction**

The Thessalonians remained close in Paul's heart, even though he was absent from them, and forced to leave in difficult circumstances. The example of Paul, Silas and Timothy while they were with them would stay in their minds as a good example of christian behaviour.

## **Body of the Study**

### **Beginning the work in Thessalonica**

### **Working in Thessalonica**

### **The effect of the ministry**

### **Separated but not forgotten**

## **Homework and preparation for next week:**

- *Re-read chapters 1 and 2 carefully. Paul brings some things to their attention (recollection) as he says "you yourselves know..." or "you recall...". Make a list of the things that Paul reminds them of in these chapters. What is the message that he is telling them through these things?*
- *How would you describe Paul's leadership style amongst the Thessalonians? What were the traits that he exhibited (and also the ones that he didn't exhibit) that defined his style as a leader? Make a positive and a negative list.*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 3 in preparation for the next study.

## Notes for study 3: Chapter 2

### Introduction

The Thessalonians remained close in Paul's heart, even though he was absent from them, and forced to leave in difficult circumstances. The example of Paul, Silas and Timothy while they were with them would stay in their minds as a good example of christian behaviour.

### Body of the Study

#### ***Beginning the work in Thessalonica***

Paul, Silas, and Timothy had come to Thessalonica from Philippi, where Paul and Silas had been imprisoned. They had been unjustly (since they had not done anything worthy of the beating) and unlawfully (since they were Romans) beaten. The Magistrates recognised that they should not have beaten them, and "politely" ask them to leave the city (Acts 16:35-39). Shortly afterwards, they come to Thessalonica, probably still bearing the scars from the beatings. [They had "*passed through*" Amphipolis and Appollonia. If this was just an overnight stop, then they would have arrived in Thessalonica only a few days after the beating. On the other hand, If Luke gives us some *windows* into the places and events that Paul went to, and they had stayed for some time in those cities, then they may have arrived in Thessalonica several months after the beatings.]

In any case, when they came to Thessalonica, they would have come with the *reputation* for what had happened to them in Philippi. The work in Thessalonica was not without its accomplishments. When Paul came, there was no church there, but after a few weeks, he left behind a group of christians who went out to set the region on fire for the Lord "...*For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. <sup>2</sup>But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict...*" (1:2:1-2 NKJV) The beatings in Philippi had not diminished Paul's enthusiasm or work for the Lord.

The Thessalonians were suffering under conflict from the Jews in that city, just as Paul, Silas, and Timothy had been when they came bearing the marks of sufferings. They did not come with bad feeling towards the Thessalonians, nor were they trying to deceive them by false teaching. In fact the contrary was true "...*For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. <sup>4</sup>On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts...*" (1:2:3-4 NIV). The apostles' teaching as well as their behaviour amongst the Thessalonians was pure and incorrupt. In contrast to the false teachers (who would no doubt arrive at some time). Their speech was not to flatter the Thessalonians with the kind of *all talk and little delivery* that might describe those who would follow. They came teaching the pure word of God, and had the purest of motives "...*we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cherishes her own children...*" (1:2:7 NKJV).

#### ***Working in Thessalonica***

When they came, they certainly taught the gospel, but that was not all. Their manner of life whilst they were in Thessalonica was to demonstrate the way that christians ought to live "...*we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us...*" (1:2:8 NKJV)

During the stay in Thessalonica, the church at Philippi sent support to Paul on at least two occasions (Php 4:15-16), and Paul (and Silas and Timothy also, since Paul uses the description "we") worked to support themselves. By doing so, Paul removed any possibility of a charge that he had anything but selfless motives, since he worked (probably as a tentmaker) so that he might present the gospel to the Thessalonians free of charge "...*For you remember, brethren, our labour and toil; for labouring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached the gospel of God...*" (1:2:9 NKJV).

This fact will become of more significance later in the letters (and studies), as some of the Thessalonians believed that the return of the Lord was imminent, and therefore they had "downed tools" and were sitting around waiting for it to happen. As a result, they had become a burden on those who were still working and were providing food and sustenance for them. By working with his own hands whilst amongst them, Paul demonstrated that this was not the right behaviour for God's people, and he could not be charged with

having set such an example in any way. "...you are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe..." (1:2:10 NKJV).

He has already used the metaphor of a mother nurturing her children, and he now switches to that of a father who teaches and admonishes them. Paul's nurturing was to help them come to a maturity in the faith "...encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory..." (1:2:12 NIV).

### ***The effect of the ministry***

With the short time that the church had been established, and the influence that they had had over the surrounding region, we can see that not only was Paul effective in achieving the outcome, but the Thessalonians were good material with good hearts for him to work with. He had not forgotten about the Thessalonians, and they had been in the forefront of his mind since he left (as he will show in chapter 3). Since he had left, he had continually remembered them in his prayers, thanking God "...continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe..." (1:2:13 NIV).

In just the same way that the Judea churches had been persecuted (and yet remained faithful), so the Thessalonians had grown through their suffering. They should not think that they were the problem, as the Jews not only persecuted the Christians in Judea, but they had persecuted God's prophets beforehand, and had killed the Saviour. "...For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews,<sup>15</sup> who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out..." (1:2:14-15 NIV).

The Jews were doing these things in the name of God, however their actions were in no way pleasing to God. As confirmation, they only needed to look back to the persecution of the prophets (as Stephen reminded them when he appeared before the Sanhedrin - Acts 7:52), and then having put to death the Messiah. These were the same group of people who persecuted Paul (and would do so again when he returned to Jerusalem about 6 years after he wrote the letter).

The real issue with the Jews was that Paul was ministering to the Gentiles. It was at this point when they interrupted him in his speech in Jerusalem (Acts 22:21-22), and usually when the Jews would turn against him as he established churches during his travels. The Jews believed that they were God's chosen people, and that they were right with God because of the promises to Abraham (in particular the National promise – I will make of thee a great nation). However they had ignored the seed promise (through thy seed (Christ) shall all the nations (ie both Jews and Gentiles) of the earth be blessed). They could not conceive of a situation where Gentiles could be acceptable to God, nor could there be anything but the Jewish religion. Consequently, they persecuted the Christians wherever they were, and especially those who went about converting Gentiles. "...They displease God and are hostile to all men<sup>16</sup> in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved..." (1:2:15-16 NIV).

God is a God of justice, and He will ensure that they receive what they deserve "...they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last..." (1:2:16 NIV).

### ***Separated but not forgotten***

Paul, Silas and Timothy had been away from Thessalonica for about 6 months. There were at least two occasions where Paul had tried to return, but he was unable to do so. Most likely, one of them was whilst they were in Berea. After the Thessalonian Jews arrived, Paul was forced to leave Berea, and had to do so under escort from some of the Berean brethren who took him to Athens. "...we endeavoured eagerly to see you with great desire ... we wanted to come to you time and again, but Satan hindered us..." (1:2:17-18).

Silas and Paul had initially remained in Berea, and then Timothy had been sent back to Thessalonica to find out the news of the brethren. That Paul himself did not come was not because of his lack of interest. The Thessalonians were still dear in the heart of Paul. His absence was not by choice, and although he was absent in the body, yet he was near to them in spirit. Paul regarded them (as he also did the Philippians Php 4:1) as his "...joy and crown..." (1:2:19).

He looked towards the time of the Lord's return, when Paul would present them to the Lord, as his prize, just as an ancient mariner (discoverer) such as Captain James Cook would have returned to the King with the prizes of his voyages of discovery. There is an illusion here to the issue of the second coming, that Paul will deal with a little later in the letters.