Worthy of God

1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13

Paul has been expressing his thankfulness for the Thessalonian Christians concerning their reception of the gospel and their ongoing faithfulness to God. Furthermore, Paul has discussed how he and his companions conducted themselves while they were in Thessalonica.

The purpose of this lesson is to learn about Paul's concern for the Thessalonian gospel experienced in Thessalonica and pray that we would be encouraged in a study of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13.

Opposition To The Gospel In Thessalonica (2:13-20)

Reception of the gospel despite opposition (2:13-16a). Like a father with his children (w. 11-12), Paul and his companions were concerned about the spiritual well-being of the Thessalonians. They were constantly thankful for the way the Thessalonian Christians received the message they preached – receiving it as the word of God rather than a human message. This passage is further evidence that Paul's message was not his own. Rather, Paul was Divinely inspired in his teaching (1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 1 Corinthians 14:37; Ephesians 3:3-6)! This word of God works powerfully in those who believe, both to save and to transform (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12).

The Thessalonian Christians had become imitators of God's churches in Christ Jesus that were in Judea in the sense they had experienced suffering at the hands of their fellow countrymen. The Jews had killed the Lord Jesus and the Jewish prophets, and had persecuted Jewish Christians. Similarly, the Thessalonians had persecuted those who had become Christians in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). Therefore, the church in Thessalonica was an example of faithfulness by their endurance in the same way, true followers of Jesus are not just willing to follow Jesus when it is convenient; but also when doing so results in persecution/rejection.

alongside their earnest prayer that was made both night and day for the opportunity to see the Thessalonians again and continue the work of helping them progress in their faith. Namely, Paul recognized there were still some things that were lacking in their faith he desired an opportunity to help them complete (just as all Christians must continue to grow stronger in the faith God has revealed).

Paul's prayer (3:11-13). Paul closes this section of his letter (looking back at what had transpired with the Thessalonians) with a prayer concerning the Thessalonians. Perhaps this is indicative of the prayers he would offer night and day for them (3:10). Namely, we notice three things he prayed for.

First, Paul prayed that God (the Father) and the Lord Jesus Christ would direct their way to visit the Thessalonians. He recognized there were factors larger than himself involved in visiting the Thessalonians (2:18) and trusted God was able to clear a way for them to visit the Thessalonians if it was God's will. Second, Paul prayed for the Lord to cause them to increase and overflow with love for one another. Since love is of God and we learn true love from God, God can cause us to increase in our love for others (i.e. through learning about and experiencing God's love for us, as well as learning how He wants us to love, 4:9). Third, Paul prayed that God would make their hearts blameless in holiness before God at Jesus's coming (when He comes with all His saints) so they would be saved on this great Day. Christians should all be anticipating this Day when Jesus Christ will return. Then, notice that Paul will address two of these items he has just prayed about in the remainder of his letter – by giving instructions concerning love and continued growth in connection with the coming of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

We have explored the opposition experienced by the gospel in Thessalonica and Paul's concern for the Thessalonian Christians. In the next lesson, we will study 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18.

Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series
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Those in opposition to the gospel displease God (2:15b-16). The Jews who killed Jesus and those in Thessalonica who rejected the gospel and brought suffering on those who accepted it accomplished two things. First, they displeased God through their own rejection of the gospel. Second, they demonstrated hostility to everyone else by hindering the gospel from being spread (particularly to the Gentiles) so they could not be saved. And, anyone who stands opposed to the gospel accomplishes these same two things today.

Those who stand opposed to the gospel are constantly testing the limits of God's patience, pictured as constantly filling up their sins to the limit (like filling a cup to its brim). Although God is a patient God (2 Peter 3:9), God's patience only extends so far. Therefore, wrath is said to have overtaken (come on them) at last! Certainly, God will show His wrath on those who oppose and reject the gospel on the Judgment Day (1:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). However, there are also other ways God shows His wrath on people while they live on earth (Romans 1:18). While I do not know exactly how these experienced God's wrath (some have speculated it may refer to the impending destruction that would come on Jerusalem in A.D. 70), we know that sin often carries physical consequences and always carries spiritual consequences!

Paul's desire to see the Christians in Thessalonica (2:17-20). Paul wanted the Thessalonian Christians to recognize that it was deeply painful to leave them. And, he wanted them to know about about their deep desire to return. He described their separation as a forced one (like a child torn away/orphaned from parents). Still, their hearts were with the Thessalonian church and demonstrated their desire to see them face-to-face by making every effort to return. In fact, he had wanted to come to them but had been hindered by Satan (like an obstruction blocking the road). This demonstrates Satan is active in the world, beyond just providing temptation (Job 1-2; 2 Corinthians 12:7). Evidently, Satan wanted to keep them separate. Likewise, Satan wants to hinder people today from accomplishing things that are profitable in the Lord's service. Yet, we must always find a way to accomplish God's will regardless of how Satan hinders (as Paul sent Timothy to them).

Although Paul knew the ultimate hope, joy, and crown of boasting for every Christian is Jesus Himself and His sacrifice, he also saw the Thessalonian Christians accomplishing these things for him and his companions, who had a part in leading them to Christ. They were proof Paul and his companions had been diligently laboring for the Lord and helping others have eternal life in Heaven (Philippians 2:14-16; Philippians 4:1). In the same way, there is nothing you can do in this life that can give you a greater sense of accomplishment besides helping others follow the Lord to be saved!

Concern About The Thessalonians (3:1-13)

Timothy sent to Thessalonica (3:1-5). As Paul was continually thinking about these new Christians, it reached a point where Paul could not stand it any longer and was willing to be left alone in Athens. Perhaps they had joined him in Athens for a short time prior or perhaps he sent Timothy to Thessalonica from Berea (Acts 17:14-16). Regardless, Timothy (God's coworker, 1 Corinthians 3:9) was sent for the purpose of strengthening and encouraging the faith of the Thessalonians, as they needed to be further grounded and built up in the truth (2 Peter 1:3-11). This needed to happen so they would not be shaken (moved) by the afflictions they were experiencing so as to turn away from Christ.

In fact, Paul reminds them they and all Christians are appointed (destined) to experience such (Matthew 5:10-12; 2 Timothy 3:12). He had kept telling them there would be afflictions in following Jesus while they were together. Now, Paul was concerned about them and wanted to know how their faith was doing. That is why he had sent Timothy to them – as he could not stand the concern about them any longer. For, he was concerned the tempter (Satan) had tempted them. And, if they had given in to the temptations, their labor would have been for nothing as far as the salvation of the Thessalonians was concerned (though Paul would have still done his part, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Report from Timothy (3:6-10). After explaining why he sent Timothy to them, he now explains what Timothy reported and how that impacted him. He said Timothy had come to them (meeting up with them in Corinth, Acts 18:5) and brought good news about the Thessalonians' faith and love, noticing they always had good memories of Paul and his companions and longed to see them.

This news had a tremendously positive impact on Paul and his companions. First, they were encouraged and comforted to press on through the distress and affliction they had been experiencing. Second, they were given a boost of encouragement to keep pressing forward and really live and accomplish God's work with joy (3 John 1:3-4). Furthermore, because Paul saw the news of the Thessalonians' faithfulness as a true blessing from God, he desired to give thanks to God on their behalf and for the joy that he experienced. Their prayer of thanks would be offered