

## Bible Study Notes

*(A basic transcription with modifications for style and clarity)*

### **1 THESSALONIANS 1:1 - 3:13**

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Brian Orchard, November 25, 2016

Well, greetings again everybody. An opportunity to engage in a Bible Study together via this electronic means. I hope we are really appreciating how important it is for us to look into and spend more time with God's word.

This Bible Study is being recorded within days of the presidential election which took place here in the United States. It seems, at least by appearances, that within our country and within the world, things have changed very dramatically almost overnight.

I know we all struggle to make sense of the unfolding events that are around us. And there are many things that could be broken down into their individual components and analyzed and we've got many so-called experts that are doing just that. Commentators and people on television, radio and in the printed media trying to analyze why we have the situation that we have. Thankfully God has given us a broader framework for understanding what is going on around us and it's a very important framework.

In a few weeks we'll be celebrating the day of Thanksgiving here in the United States. Now, ostensibly that day represents a day of thanks to God for the wonderful blessings that He has provided this nation. And, of course, that is certainly true. This nation has been wonderfully blessed. But, we also know that these blessings have come as a result of God's faithfulness, His faithful completion of the promises that He made to Abraham. He made a covenant and within that covenant there were certain things He promised He would do. He has met His obligations.

As He gave the indication of those blessings, He also gave a very clear warning in regard to those blessings. To just paraphrase it here just a little, "If you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God...all these curses will come upon you and overtake you."

We have enjoyed the blessings very much. But we're now in a period of time, as time moves on, where the curses are starting to overtake us. We've entered into the "overtake you" phase of God's dealing with Israel.

Now, we're familiar with the term "The West", referring to western civilization. And just to generalize a very generalized statement, it refers to many of the modern day descendants of the nation of Israel.

A comment published just this morning from the Chief Economist of the German Commerzbank summed it up in this manner; a very short statement. He said, "The self-destruction of the West continues." And I think that points to where we are and what is happening – the self-destruction, the internal destruction in particular, and I'm just focusing on this nation. It follows through with some of the things that God has told us.

But what you and I need to appreciate (and I'm thinking here in terms of these Bible Studies that we have together), is the opportunity to get into God's word; a couple of things that Christ said in relation to these unfolding events.

He said, first of all, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming." As I said, these events this week unfolded in what appeared, at least to most of us, to come very, very rapidly and very quickly and somewhat unexpectedly. Christ, two verses later, went on to say, "Therefore you also be ready (firstly watch, then He says be ready), for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

At this point in time (it's always true), but at this point in time our relationship with God is vitally important. We've always known that it is important. But given the time and given what is happening around us, we don't have a lot of time to dig deep, to build a very firm and strong relationship with God.

These two admonitions, watch and be ready, mean: to keep awake, to be vigilant, to be prepared, to be made ready. And this is the time for us to be made ready. And so, my take-away from this week is simply: "Am I ready? Am I preparing, am I doing what I need to be doing in my relationship with God so that I am ready?" And to this end the study of God's word is vitally important. So, I'm just trying to say: Bible Study is very important for us right now. To be very familiar with God's word, to be looking, to be digging, to be seeking with a greater understanding of God's truth and God's way of life; building and strengthening a relationship with God.

What I've chosen to look at tonight should encourage us to do exactly that. I want to take a look at a letter that Paul wrote that contains something very interesting for us to think about at this time.

In his letter to the Thessalonian Church, Paul brings together a number of things that we as a group are trying to focus on and trying to practice together. It is a reinforcement, if you like, of who we are and what we want to become as we build and strengthen our relationship with our Father.

We need a little background to how Paul became involved with the people in Thessalonica to make some sense of the comments that he makes in the letter because

sometimes he just refers to something without filling in a lot of detail. A little background, I think, would be very helpful to us here.

When we read of Paul's calling, as we do in the book of Acts, God clearly had in mind that salvation would be offered to the Gentiles. It very clearly states, that in dealing with Paul as he was struck down on the road to Damascus, God had in mind for this man to take the gospel to the Gentiles. It didn't exclude Jews, but it enlarged it from the Jews into the area of the Gentiles.

For the Jews, this presented a great tension. Acts 10, verse 28. I'm looking here at God helping Peter come to understand something that Paul was called to do.

**Acts 10:28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation.**

So there was the tension that the Jews believed they were not to have anything to do with the Gentiles or the other nations that surrounded them. And what God was showing Peter here, through a very clear and powerful vision, was that salvation was being offered for all mankind. Verse 34:

**34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.**

**35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.**

So, this is enlarging the understanding of the ministry of that time to what God was wanting to do in terms of the preaching of the gospel and the offering of salvation. It was far more expansive than the Jews had in their mind.

It was at Antioch that Paul and Barnabas ran into a reasonably serious problem caused by the Jews making demands based on their perception and their understanding of God's law and wanting to force some requirements on the Gentiles that were unfavorable. It was circumcision that was the issue and certainly it was an important issue if you were a male adult and a Gentile. There was no small dissension, it says in Acts chapter 15.

**Acts 15:1 And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."**

**2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.**

So it was a serious question and one that needed the entire Church to address it and to come to one mind in agreement of it. And so, we have the record here of the

Jerusalem conference. It's recorded here in Acts chapter 15. The matter was taken to Jerusalem. In verse 22 after they had discussed it and God had shown to them and they had come to an agreement as to what was the right approach:

**22 Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.**

And so, having resolved the issue, now they're sending some of the leading ministers back to Antioch to take the message of this Jerusalem conference back and share it with the people. Verse 30:

**30 So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter.**

**31 When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.**

**32 Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.**

And so it was a very positive and a very encouraging time that some new truth, in that sense, had been revealed and understood by this very early Church.

**33 And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles (Judas and Silas).**

**34 However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.**

**35 Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.**

So then Paul, after a while, decided that it would be beneficial to go back and visit some of the areas they previously had been in and do some encouraging of those brethren now that there had been such a positive reception here in Antioch. Verse 36:

**36 Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing."**

And this is where Paul and Barnabas separated ways over a disagreement as to who they should take and who should go with them. Paul chose Silas and then he departed and went off to do what he had said he was going to do; to visit the brethren in every city where they had preached the word to encourage the brethren.

So now Paul and Silas are together as a team and added to this team is Timothy. Now, Timothy is a very young man at this point in time. This team works together extremely well and they're featured in the opening of the letter to the Thessalonians. That's why we need to look and see how they come to be featured here.

Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman, but his father was Greek. They're going to be moving on into areas where there would be many Greeks and so Paul thought it best that if Timothy was circumcised, that the Jews would be more open to listening to the message that they brought. And so that took place.

They then went through the cities and they delivered to them the decrees to keep which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. So this Jerusalem conference decree was being spread now way beyond Antioch. So the Churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily.

So they went on their way and if you understand the area, they're coming up from Antioch into what we understand to be modern day Turkey. They're moving across through that area and were going to go to the western part of Turkey (the area where the seven Churches are located). But God had something else in mind and when they came to Mysia they tried to go on, but the Holy Spirit did not permit them.

**Acts 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."**

So that's exactly what Paul did in response to the vision. This is then, across the Aegean Sea into the area that would be Macedonia; the southern part of what I understand would have been Yugoslavia and into the area which we know today as Greece. So, we're going deep into Gentile territory. That's where God is specifically sending these men.

These three became principle players in the Church of Thessalonica. We see that they come into Philippi which, again, is (I think) about 80 miles from Thessalonica. I'm not exactly sure, but in reasonably close proximity to each other. And they began to preach there and to make a certain impact.

An incident happened there that caused a great deal of trouble for Paul and Silas. Paul cast a demon out of a person and that person was being used to make profit. So the owner of this slave that had the demon got very upset with Paul. Verse 19:

**Acts 16:19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.**

**20 And they brought them to the magistrates... ( and it says in verse 23)**

**23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison...**

Now, some people feel that the stripes mentioned here was in reference to scourging. Certainly the word means wound. Whether it was scourging or just beating with rods, it was a severe punishment that was meted out to Paul. And then they were thrown in prison. From this point, they were released from prison by a miracle and then they reported to the officers. But then they moved on. Paul made a point of forcing the

authorities to let them go in good grace, so to speak. So they moved on. Chapter 17 tells us that they moved on to Thessalonica from that point.

**Acts 17:1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.**

**2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,**

**3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."** (And the preaching was very effective.)

**4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.**

So, here we see a fertile area for receiving the message, going into the synagogue where there were already Gentiles that had been converted to Judaism. So they've already made a transition away from their culture and the things and the baggage that came with their culture to enter into Judaism. So they seemed to have a more ready mind to hear this gospel message in reference to Jesus Christ.

Thessalonica was a Gentile city. The physical location already indicates that. It was an area controlled by the Romans. So you have the Roman influence there as well. It was an important commercial center. It was on a trade route known as Egnatian Way – Via Egnatia, a road that was built by the Romans traversing from west to east or east to west depending on which way you were walking along this road, I guess. But it went through Thessalonica and Thessalonica also had a beautiful natural harbor. And so it became a very important commercial center.

So you can add into the mix the word commerce; there would be a number of Jews there. So, even though it was a dominant Gentile area, there were a number of Jews located there as well. And so the synagogue contained Jews and Gentile converts. The initial favorable response to Paul's preaching appears to be among the Gentiles and the wives of prominent citizens in that area.

Trouble was not long coming. One of the reasons I mentioned the punishment that had been meted out was that I don't think these men would have had enough time for the wounds to have been completely healed. And yet Paul went on and immediately got into doing the work of God in this area. This becomes a statement of Paul's attitude. And we'll see what Paul's attitude was as we get into the book of 1 Thessalonians. Firstly, though, Acts chapter 17.

**Acts 17:5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar...**

And went looking for these men and couldn't find them, so they found Jason and dragged him out. So here is another very bad situation in response to Paul and Silas' preaching here in this area. Verse 10.

**10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea...**

Not a great distance away, and Paul continued on.

**11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.**

**12 Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.**

So again, another favorable response in this area to the preaching of the gospel. But the Jews in Thessalonica, who were driven by envy, found out that they were in Berea and went after them in Berea.

**13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.**

Trouble followed Paul as he delved into the Gentile areas where God had sent him to go and preach the gospel.

**14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there (in Berea).**

Paul went on to Athens and immediately called for Silas and Timothy to come to him in Athens, which they did.

**16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.**

Of course, idol worship, idolatry, was a serious problem in the Gentile areas; something that the Church members had to deal with. So Paul was in Athens. He waited for them; he dealt with this situation of the unknown god and made a point of preaching in regard to that.

**Acts 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.**

So Silas and Timothy had come to Paul. Paul then moves on to Corinth where he was going to be for about a year and half, as it tells us. So he has a lengthy stay in Corinth. At some point he sends Timothy back to Thessalonica to shore up, to strengthen, to encourage the brethren.

It is thought that 1 Thessalonians was written from this location, the city of Corinth. It was written after Timothy went to Thessalonica, spent some time there and came back with a report to Paul. And as a result of that report being brought to him by

Timothy, Paul sat down and wrote a letter to the Church in Thessalonica. It is an incredibly encouraging letter, but it's a very powerful letter, as well. That is the point I'm going to try and make plain to you with this study.

Paul, Silas and Timothy were all heavily involved in pastoring and caring for the Church in Corinth, which is why the letter begins by simply saying:

**1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, [Silas], and Timothy,**

That's just how he starts it. These men were all well-known in Thessalonica and extremely well-regarded. This was a very powerful ministerial team that worked together. Silas and Timothy worked well with Paul. Paul highly regarded them. Paul highly regarded the work that they did amongst the brethren and so that's why the letter begins by addressing these three men.

I want to present this letter to you as a letter of great encouragement to us as a group. It reinforces the basic tenants that we laid down nearly three years ago – shepherding and the family style of governance. Both of those issues are strongly reaffirmed here in the conduct of the members in Thessalonica.

Given the brief background of the environment, it is not difficult to understand why the Church needed some encouragement. One of the reasons why we spent a little bit of time in Acts was to understand the environment. Both the Jewish and Gentile frame of mind was not conducive to the gospel message Paul preached in general. There were pockets of it. We read when he went into the synagogue. But very quickly there was opposition to it that drove them on. I might just recap out of Acts chapter 18 to make that point. In verse 6 it says:

**Acts 18:6 But when they opposed him and blasphemed...**

This is opposing Paul. Timothy and Silas had come and "Paul was compelled by the Spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ" and he met a great deal of opposition so:

**...he shook his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."**

And on he went. He departed from that point. A little later we see a situation where the Greeks took the ruler of the synagogue and beat him before the judgment seat. So it is a difficult environment for the work that Paul was doing and difficult for the members of the Church.

Jews in particular did not accept that Jesus was the Christ. And so, here was Paul talking about "Jesus is the Christ." Not a message they wanted to hear. The Gentiles were steeped in paganism and philosophy, so there was idolatry and you look at what Paul was dealing with in Athens with the philosophy, the Epicureans and so on. That was a problem. What is encouraging, though, within the Church in Thessalonica is the



clear evidence of the working of God's Holy Spirit. What happened in Thessalonica could not have happened without the powerful working of God's Holy Spirit. In verse 1 of 1 Thessalonians chapter 1:

**1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:**

Now that's a huge step. Paul, remember, had not spent a great deal of time there. There's some variation of time, from a very short period of time, a few weeks as it mentions the three Sabbaths, to a few months that he spent in that area. Not a great deal of time. There was follow-up from Silas and Timothy. And yet we are introduced to the description of the Church as "In God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Something very powerful had taken place here and as Paul makes very clear, it wasn't of him. This was of God. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Now, Paul puts that statement in the beginning of just about every letter that he wrote. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." That's quite a statement and he repeats it every time he writes a letter to one of the Churches. Its power is driven home to us as we read Romans 5, verses 1 and 2. You know this well. It says:

**Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,**

**2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**

Through grace, through God's favor, we are able to have peace through Jesus Christ. And coming in under the blood of Jesus Christ, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, having all of the burdens removed and coming into a clean and wonderful relationship with the Father, "Grace to you and peace" is a very meaningful statement. And it is something that we need to think about because our environment is vastly different in many ways from the environment of Thessalonica, but as far as human nature is concerned it's not so different. And it's difficult. It's difficult to be a member of God's Church in this environment.

Some of the different reasons are different from that time to this time, but in terms of its impact upon the mind, it's difficult and we need peace; peace of mind. The point is, we can have peace of mind through the working of God's Holy Spirit.

**1 Thessalonians 1:2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,**

Right off the bat, here, we're introduced to this concept of being thankful. As we've covered in a recent sermon, a very important element of our relationship with God is the way we view things, view life. View God's working with us, if we're being thankful for

the things that God does for us. “We give thanks to God always for you all”, knowing that the thanks are not for the environment. The peace is not in their physical location. The peace is in their hearts and in their minds, in their relationship with God. That’s the peace we need and we need to be thankful to God regularly and in prayer for it. He said:

**2 ...making mention of you in our prayers,**

Not just thanking each other, but thanking God for the peace that He makes available to us. Paul’s attitude here, towards the members of this Church, is just outstanding.

**3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,**

Three very important basic elements: faith, love and hope. And this comes up in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, of course, where it ends up by saying the greatest of these is love. These are powerful, spiritual traits. Their response to being called has been powerful. I might just add in verse 4, to make sure we cover our “calling”.

**4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.**

What Paul is saying here is, “You could not be doing this on your own strength. This is absolute evidence that God has called you, brought you into a relationship with Him.” He refers to it here as “Your election by God. You couldn’t do this; I couldn’t do this. There’s no preaching that I could have done of myself that would have produced this result.” That is an important aspect of the relationship between these people and God as well.

**5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.**

Mr. Stiver covered this aspect of “in word only” in a recent sermon concerning the Holy Spirit. Words have meanings and the gospel, if we are not careful, can be just a group of words with a fairly intellectual level of perception of understanding of those words. But Paul is saying here, “Our gospel did *not* come to you in word only”. It wasn’t at that superficial level. He said, “...but also in power and in the Holy Spirit.”

It didn’t come from Paul or Silas or Timothy. This was from God. Paul knew that and he was making sure that they knew that, too.

**...you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.**

And now Paul injects himself in here, but not in a way to promote himself. But to promote the way God worked through him for their sake.

**6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,**

There are no contradiction here. They were in affliction from the environment in which they lived and what was going on here with the Jews and some of the Gentiles in response to the message that Paul and the others had brought. But the joy was from the Holy Spirit. It was a spiritual source of joy. Not a physical source of joy. And here we have something that we've been trying to say clearly a number of different ways. Paul here is involved as a man, but he didn't draw the people of Thessalonica to himself. He drew them in such a way that they looked through him to Jesus Christ and made the connection to Christ and the Father.

"And you became followers of us and of the Lord." So Paul makes very certain that they understand they're not to look to him. That his job is to draw them to Christ and, through Christ, to the Father. Then in verse 7 he makes this comment.

**7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.**

Now this is an incredible statement to be made about a congregation of the Church of God. "You became examples." The word "example" means a stamp, something that makes an impression. You could take a stamp and you make an impression on a piece of paper, a piece of clay or something similar to that. They were making an impression on other people; it was not just limited to that area. He said:

**8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.**

Word was spreading, members were talking. I don't know whether the Jews were talking (not the Jews in the Church). I don't know exactly how this was passed on, but their example was noted and spread around.

**...Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.**

"Your example speaks for itself." Isn't that the way it is supposed to be for God's Church, for God's people? Your example speaks for itself. Let's note Isaiah 42, verse 6, because that's how it is to be for us. We aren't in a position to move the whole Church into this position, we only have the power to move ourselves into this position.

**Isaiah 42:6 "I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness (the election that Paul talked about to the Church in Thessalonica), and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles,**

He's speaking to the Church as those called, the elect; called to an election. You are to be a light to the Gentiles. Chapter 43, verse 10:

**Isaiah 43:10 "You are My witnesses," says the Lord (examples, I've called you to be examples, witnesses), "And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may**

**know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. (What a relationship!) Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.**

**11 I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior.**

**12 I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; Therefore you are My witnesses," says the Lord, "that I am God.**

He is saying, "You are to be living examples that I am God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, working within you to produce a product that no human mind, of itself, could produce." This is a supernatural thing that is being addressed here, if you want to put it in those terms.

The example that is going forth is not just a group of nice people who have picnics on Sunday and bingo nights midweek. This is a group of people that are exhibiting the power and the Holy Spirit working in a human mind.

**1 Thessalonians 1:9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,**

It was quite a switch for them to be heavily surrounded by idolatry. They went through these areas where temple worship involved prostitution, a great deal of immorality. In fact, temple prostitution was considered a form of worship. And these people came away from that after what must have been a reasonably short period of time. This is not a 50-year life of conversion, of overcoming and growing.

This letter to the Thessalonians is being written in the early 50's AD. It's one of the first letters, if not the first letter, that Paul wrote. So the timing is condensed here for these things to be taking place, but it has taken place such that they could be the Church in God the Father and Jesus Christ. This is a powerful witness that this group is giving.

**10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

Their focus was turned towards the returning Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the God family that would be created at the time of the resurrection. Those in the grave would be resurrected first. Those who are alive, changed. The God family being formed. So they're looking to the return of Jesus Christ.

And remember, they've just come from this background of idols and from Judaism. This group has melded together in such a way that they've left the baggage behind. They've welded together in such a way, spiritually, that they're an example to everyone round about. Isn't that what the Church of God is supposed to be? Isn't this what God intended? Certainly! Chapter 2. The world needs this kind of an example. The Church needs this kind of spiritual wholeness. This Thessalonian congregation was a very

healthy and spiritually whole congregation. They were not without their problems, not perfect. But this is worth noting:

**1 Thessalonians 2:1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.**

Now it would seem from what is stated in the next few verses, that when Timothy came back and reported to Paul there were some issues that apparently needed to be addressed. Some things that started to raise their head within the congregation. Remember, Paul hadn't been there for a long time. He wanted to get back, but didn't get back. Maybe some outside influence was causing some to question. "You say Paul was teaching that, we say this. How do you know that Paul is right?"

**...our coming to you was not in vain.**

**2 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.**

Like I said, the time frame from the beating that they received and their arrival in Thessalonica, when Paul was standing up and boldly speaking, was short. You would think, from a human point of view, that Paul could have said, "Look, I need to take a few weeks to get things together here. Due to the wounds that I'm bearing on my body, my health is not so great." But no, he just charged on and went straight into it.

**3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.** (So, apparently somebody was telling the people in Thessalonica these things.)

**4 But as we have been approved by God...**

Tested, tried by God. They certainly went through some very trying and difficult times.

**...to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.**

He wanted them to know the sincerity, not only of himself, but of the message and of the truth that he brought to them.

**5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness — God is witness.**

And many times people use God's people for covetousness; for personal gain. That's true today. There are men who use the Church of God for their own personal gain, whether it be a psychological gain or a monetary gain. And these things have happened. And Paul is saying, we did not use you as a cloak for our covetousness.

**6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.**

Now, I didn't read that to you. I could have read from Acts chapter 18, where Paul said that he was a tent maker and he went and plied his trade. He would go and work at tent making and then go and preach the gospel. Paul supported himself when he knew full well, and he states in other places, he could have required them to support him from tithes and offerings. He didn't do that. He didn't put any burden on them, as we just read in verse 6: "We didn't seek glory from men, and we might have made demands as apostles of Christ." He did not do that because of the style of ministry that Paul conducted and we see that in the next verse.

**7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.**

We start to see here a beautiful relationship between the shepherd and those being shepherded. And this is what we are trying to build, what we are trying to achieve. I don't think everyone understands that clearly. I don't think that even those amongst us, who worship with us on a weekly basis on the Sabbath, fully appreciate this point. I think we still, to some degree, are trained to think organizationally. And yet, here we are, trying to break through into this very important area of true, proper shepherding and the creation of a family environment for the Church itself, that can make a connection to God as a family – the Elohim, God and His Son; fulfilling the purpose that God created man for – to create a family.

Here Paul is a model example of a minister. I read this and I feel ashamed. I wish I could be the type of minister that Paul references here. It's a great goal to have and it is a goal. He says, "I was gentle among you." He's been flogged, he's been beaten and he was being persecuted. He was driven from one place to another and yet, when it came to the people of God, he was very, very gentle, "like a nursing mother cherishing her children." He loved the people that God called and brought together in an election.

**8 So, affectionately longing for you, 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.**

He was prepared to lay down his physical life, to give up his life for these people. He didn't have a long time to build a bond with them before he had to move on to other places. And yet, this man, because they were God's people, was prepared to lay down his life for them. What an example of a shepherd's heart! Something that we want to achieve, something that we are working towards and I hope you can see and feel that.

**9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.**

Working to support himself and then going on and preaching full time is a lot of labor and toil. But Paul did it and he did it willingly alongside Silas and Timothy. The three of them were a great team in that regard.

**10 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe** (a great example);

**11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,**

There is that example in the book of Corinthians where you have the Father, Christ, the human father, the wife and then the children.

**...as a father does his own children.**

And that's the way Paul, Silas and Timothy are approaching the pastoral role in this particular congregation. And it's being done out of great love and great affection. They were able to get down on their knees regularly. "I give thanks to God always for you." They were able to go to God very regularly and express their gratitude and their thanks to God for them – great love and great passion and concern for the people of God. In verse 13:

**13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.**

And again, this is a powerful example of what God's Holy Spirit can do. It worked powerfully and it worked fairly quickly in the lives of these people. I suppose you could go back to the initial day of Pentecost, when 5,000 were converted basically on the spot from the preaching that took place that day. I guess the point is, that God's Holy Spirit can work very powerfully *if* we let it. If we grasp the Holy Spirit as a power that gives us much assurance and moves us and motivates us and we respond to that motivation.

**14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus.** (The Church of God in Judea, pointing down towards the Church in Jerusalem where they went for the conference.) **For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans,**

And so, they had that example to follow. But Paul is holding them up and saying, "You became imitators. You followed their faithful example in the face of provocation and trial."

**15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men,**

**16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.**

The wrath will come. The wrath had not come at that one particular time when he was writing this. It was something that would come, a future judgment. But they forbid

Paul to do the work, to hold back the good news of the gospel from these people. So he upholds the Church here in Thessalonica, equating them with those Churches then in Judea.

**17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.**

**18 Therefore we wanted to come to you — even I, Paul, time and again — but Satan hindered us.**

Paul makes reference to being hindered in the first chapter of Romans. He doesn't use the word Satan in that regard, but it's implied. Now, I don't know exactly what it was that hindered them to be able to pinpoint and say that's what Satan did. It may not be anything as specific as that. It just may have been the attitude and the spirit of Satan that caused such turmoil or strife, or whatever it was, that prevented him from doing what he wanted to do. But whatever it was, he indicated that Satan hindered them.

We know that Satan wants to hinder the work of God. He's always there. He's an ever-present force against this condition that we've been reading about here in Thessalonica. A cohesive, spiritual group of people. Strong, positive, godly leadership and a group of people who are responding to that. And they're bonding together in a tight bond. Satan doesn't want that. He wants the opposite.

**19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?**

**20 For you are our glory and joy.**

Again, an incredible attitude on Paul's part. His desire was for them to qualify for salvation, to be there when Jesus Christ returns and resurrected as spirit beings in the spirit family of God. That was his desire, that was his heart's wish, that's what drove him. This is not put on. This is absolutely sincere. Love, total love, on Paul's part for these people that the Father had called and brought into a relationship with Himself through Jesus Christ.

Can we begin to understand why love is so important? John, of course, wrote a great deal about it in the latter part of his life. We've got 1 John, 2 John and 3 John where he focused a great deal on love. Love is so important as was mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 3, "your labor of love". And some of that labor was amongst themselves. A love that bound this congregation together. Let's go into chapter 3:

**1 Thessalonians 3:1 Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,**

**2 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,**



That's the trip I referred to earlier when Paul, being in Athens, sent Timothy back.

**3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.**

He wanted them to be stabilized. There was a congregation sitting out there, largely on its own. These three men were a powerful influence, but they weren't there the whole time. And the congregation, maybe, began to have some doubts because of the affliction. "Everything is going wrong. If this is of God, why is this going wrong? Why are these circumstances allowed to exist if this is the Church of God?" We've heard and we've thought those kind of things. "That nobody should be shaken by these afflictions."

**4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.**

And Paul knew that the work he was doing was going to bring tribulation. It was not a message that carnal man wanted to hear, if that carnal man was a Jew or that carnal man was a Gentile. Not a naturally acceptable message and it was going to raise opposition and persecution. Paul knew that. And so he wanted them to understand, this is par for the course. This is how it is.

**5 For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.**

Paul didn't want them to give up in the face of affliction. They were going on and on and on in terms of what was around them. Within they had this joy of the Holy Spirit and he wanted to make sure that the joy of the Holy Spirit and thankfulness kept them focused where they needed to be; focused on the trunk of the tree, spiritually speaking.

**6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you —**

**7 therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.**

It was good news that Timothy brought back. Timothy would have brought an honest and accurate report. That was the man that he was. He wasn't going to sugar coat it just to make Paul feel good.

**8 For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.**

**9 For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God,**

**10 night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?**

And it was some time before Paul could get back to these people. So he's writing these things in his absence, trying to lift them, encourage them, guide them, direct them. He's being a true shepherd to these people and clearly they were responsive to that.

**11 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.**

**12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,**

And he set, by his own example, an incredible example of love and dedication and self-sacrifice to these people and he's encouraging them to do that to each other.

In one sense, there are many of you who are listening to this who are in isolated situations and much of what is here applies to you. You're out there on your own. We can't get to you to be with you nearly as often as we would like to. I'd like to be spending more time with everyone. It's just physically impossible, like it was for Paul. But you've got to be strong. You've got to be strong. Not on your own, but strong with the presence of God's Holy Spirit and being drawn by that Spirit into a powerful relationship. You can remain strong! You don't have to get tired and give up. That is not really an option in this kind of relationship we're talking about.

**13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.**

This is a beautiful example of a wholesome, family relationship within a congregation of the Church of God. This is what we stand for. If you want to know what The Father's Call stands for, this is what we stand for; to achieve what Paul, Silas and Timothy achieved with this congregation by way of their example of service and dedication as ministers being true shepherds to the people, but also the example of the people in response.

It's powerful for me to see just how quickly these people did respond, allowing the truth of God to penetrate their hearts and to shift their focus away from idols, away from the law (whether you're a Jew or a Gentile) and bring it in to a central focus with Christ and the Father and then to build something powerful and strong; a relationship of love, a relationship of outgoing concern, a relationship of dedication. This is the Church family that you and I are striving to build.

Now next time we'll go on. I just want to leave you with that thought from these first three chapters, that powerful thought of what we can be if we allow the Spirit of God to do its work in us and amongst us. ♦