

I THESSALONIANS 2

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to I Thessalonians chapter 2 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

In our last study we saw how the church in Thessalonica was born by the Word of God being taught and the illumination of the Word of God to people's hearts by the Spirit of God.

In I Thessalonians chapter 2 we are going to see how the church grew as Paul ministered to them, loved them as a mother, looked out for them as a father, and longed for them and cared for them as a brother in the Lord.

The focus is really on leadership and Paul, Silas and Timothy were great leaders. People looked up to them as examples of what a Christian is all about, this is how they were to live.

But, like today, leadership was a problem back then.

Of Paul's day, which sounds so familiar today, I'm sorry to say, listen to what W. Neil has to say. He wrote,

There has probably never been such a variety of religious cults and philosophic systems as in Paul's day. East and West had united and intermingled to produce an amalgam of real piety, high moral principles, crude superstition and gross license. Oriental mysteries, Greek philosophy, and local godlings competed for favour under the tolerant aegis [guidance] of Roman indifference. "Holy Men" of all creeds and countries, popular philosophers, magicians, astrologers, crack-pots, and cranks; the sincere and the spurious [false], the righteous and the rogue [rascal], swindlers and saints, jostled and clamoured for the attention of the credulous [gullible] and the skeptical.

- Cited in Leon Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 68

It truly does sound like our day as false teachers are tickling the ears of believers and many false doctrines have been brought into the church!

Now, as Paul opens up this chapter, he is going to show how his motives and his conduct were pure as he ministered to them, something these others couldn't say and yet Paul was being falsely accused of being like them.

Of this slander of Paul, one writer put it like this. He wrote,

False teachers assailed Paul, as they often do other faithful shepherds, by impugning his character and challenging his authority. Thus the opening statement of chapter 2 is a polemic [speech] in defense of Paul's ministry to the Thessalonians. Opponents of his ministry were lying to the church in Thessalonica concerning his integrity and sincerity. They hoped to ruin the new church by destroying its confidence in the person God had used to found it. That group probably included both unbelieving Jews and pagan Gentiles, both of whom were extremely hostile to the gospel. (This was a similar situation to the one later addressed by Paul in 2 Corinthians.) In a negative response to the coming of Messiah and His redemptive work, as well as to the spread of the gospel message, the attacks on the truth of salvation by grace escalated - and Paul was the main target.

Since the first-century world was full of false spiritual leaders and charlatans, it was easy for the apostle's foes to lump him in with those charlatans who traveled around and ministered merely to gain personal power, wealth, and prestige. . . .

In spite of the purity of Paul's life and the transforming power of his message (sufficient and convincing proof of his legitimacy as an apostle of Jesus Christ), the enemies of the gospel were having some success in convincing the Thessalonians that Paul and his companions were men of wicked intentions, nothing more than self-seeking frauds like so many other "spiritual teachers" of that time. Therefore, as distasteful as it was for Paul to have to defend himself, he answered his detractors directly and concisely for the sake of the truth.

- John MacArthur, I Thessalonians 2

And we continue to see this battle of the truth and putting down or trying to discredit those who are speaking forth the truths of God found in the Word of God today, I am sad to say.

With that as our introduction, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 2, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word this evening.

I THESSALONIANS 2

VERSES 1-2

Here in I Thessalonians 2:1-12 we see that Paul is going to show them that he is a faithful minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He will show them and remind them of what they saw in him, the work that he was doing and that is the evidence that he was a faithful minister.

This is the first quality of a faithful servant of Jesus Christ in ministry, they are –
FAITHFUL IN MINISTRY IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION - THEY WERE BOLD!

And we see that Paul wants them to remember not only how they looked when they arrived in Thessalonica, but the fruit that was born from their ministry there.

First of all, Paul and Silas were beaten in Philippi, placed in prison before they were released. So physically speaking they were hurting and bore the marks of the whipping they received in Philippi. Their bodies were scared, and maybe they even had some open wounds. Not a pretty picture to say the least, but it did not stop them from preaching the Gospel in spite of all the pain and opposition that they were facing.

Secondly, we see the fruit that was born there in Thessalonica as they brought the Gospel message to a city that was in darkness.

We are told in I Thessalonians chapter 1, **“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. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit . . . For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. 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.”** I Thessalonians 1:5-6, 8-9.

So their work in Thessalonica was not in vain, it was not empty!

And Paul wants them to understand that even with all this persecution and pain, they were **“bold”** in speaking forth the Gospel message. It is a word that speaks of ***“courage in the face of danger or opposition.”***

Not only were they bold but they were bold in the face of **“much conflict.”** This word, **“conflict”** comes from a Greek which from which we get our English word **“agony”** from. This word was often used in athletic competitions and it spoke of a struggle, a fight, a battle.

This is Paul's point. He is reminding them how he and his missionary team were very bold in the face of agonizing conflicts and struggles that the enemy was bringing upon them for the soul purpose of keeping them from preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and seeing people come to saving faith!

Now please understand that this was not done by their might, their power, their determination. This kind of boldness can only come by the empowering of the Holy Spirit!

We see this played out in the early church where we are told in Acts chapter 4, "**Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word . . . And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.**" Acts 4:29, 31.

I think many times we lack that power to do the work of God because we try to do it on our own, and it will never work. You will never have that boldness to speak forth the Word of God apart from the empowering of the Holy Spirit upon your life!

But let me also say this. Anytime you are serving the Lord, doing the work of God, the enemy will try to put an end to it.

Listen to what we are told regarding what happened in Thessalonica when Paul and his missionary team were preaching the Gospel to them.

We are told in Acts 17:5-6 how some responded to the message they spoke, **“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 attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, ‘These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.’”**

Not a bad charge against them, turning the world upside down for Jesus! But they were envious and caused an uproar because of this. And that is what happens when the Gospel is presented many times, tremendous opposition!

Then, as they traveled to Berea some 50 miles southwestward we see again trouble as they shared the Gospel message, **“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.”** Acts 17:13.

This did not stop them from speaking boldly because they knew the power of God to transform lives and they were willing to suffer, agonize to get the Gospel message out.

May we be ***FAITHFUL IN MINISTRY IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION – BE BOLD!***

VERSES 3-5

The second quality of a faithful servant of Jesus Christ in ministry is that they are ***FAITHFUL!***

There are so many leaders today who are out there doing their own thing for their own gain. Not Paul, he was serving the Lord and he was faithful in his service to the Lord.

In these verses Paul gives to us six points to show them that he was faithful to the Lord and how that was a blessing to them.

First of all, Paul tells them that this Gospel that he presented to them did not come from **“deceit”** or error!

How important that is for us today, that the message that is presented is true. But today, we see many messages that are just warm fuzzy and positive, but they miss the point of what God is saying and people leave the way they came, unchanged! No sound doctrine or healthy doctrine, but a sugar coated message!

Secondly, it did not come from **“uncleanness”** or impurity!

This Greek word was often used of sexual impurity or uncleanness, and this brings to light of what was going on in Paul’s day, and it still goes on many times today.

We are told,

In Paul’s day many of the mystery religions and Greek cults practiced and even exalted sexual perversion. Those religions were very popular because in most of them the primary religious experience centered on the cult adherents having sex with a ritual temple prostitute or the cult leader. Temple orgies were not uncommon.

Sexual intercourse had such a central role in those pagan religions because the members believed that when one had sex with a male leader or female prostitute = those supposedly closest to the gods - the individual connected with the deities.

Therefore, through fornication they supposedly achieved some sort of mystical or metaphysical union with the gods. Thus wicked, unscrupulous leaders would seek converts for the purpose of having a sexual encounter with them.

- John MacArthur

The third point that Paul speaks of is “**guile**” or deceit. The Greek word speaks of “*baiting the hook.*”

And Paul’s point is simple. He did not try to trick people into the kingdom of God, he did not use deception to **HOOK** them. And Paul is contrasting what he was doing to what the false teachers of Paul’s day were doing.

Paul spoke the truth and they could test the truth to see if it lined up with God’s Word. And that is exactly what people should do today, and many times they are not doing that, and they are being hooked by these false teachers!

The fourth point is that Paul was not a *man pleaser!* He served the Lord and if people liked him, great, if they didn’t, fine. But it was not going to cause him to change the message just to have people like him.

I know that there have been people who don’t like the message that I present, they want it to be more positive or it is too long, or it is this and it is that, and they don’t like it. I am sorry, I serve the Lord and yes, I would love to have people like me, but if they are offended by what I am teaching, the Word of God, then that is up to them to deal with. I am not changing!

The fifth point that Paul speaks of is he didn’t use “**flattering words**” when he spoke. He didn’t try to impress anyone; he just served the Lord and spoke forth the truths of God!

And the sixth point that Paul speaks of here is that he didn’t use a “**cloak for covetousness.**”

He wasn’t doing this to take from others, he was content in all that God had provided for him, whether there was much or there was little!

So a servant of God is **BOLD** and he is **FAITHFUL!**

VERSE 6

Here we see the third quality of a faithful minister of Jesus Christ, they are **HUMBLE!**

Here is the heart of a servant, not to be lifted up and receive all the attention but to bring glory to God.

Paul could have used his position as an apostle for glory, but he didn't.

What a tragedy in the church today when we elevate leaders, sometimes even worshiping them, kissing their rings and bowing down before them.

That was not part of Paul's ministry and it should not be ours; we are bondslaves of Christ, may we not lose sight of that!

You see, when a person is humble, especially in ministry, they would never take advantage of others because they're too busy thinking of the welfare of others first and putting themselves last.

So we have seen that a faithful minister of Jesus Christ is – **BOLD, FAITHFUL and HUMBLE!**

VERSES 7-9

And here we see the fourth quality of a faithful minister or servant of Jesus Christ, and that is that they are **SACRIFICIAL!**

And Paul likens himself to their mother!

Now I don't know about you, but when I think of Paul I see this tough little bow-legged guy with a hooknose enduring all kinds of persecution to move the Gospel message forward, but I don't see him as a mother, do you?

But that is truly the heart of Paul for believers.

Think of the sacrifice, the devotion, and the unselfishness of a mother to nurse her child whenever and wherever there is a need.

That was Paul in regard to feeding people the Word of God. He wanted to see them grow, mature in the faith and he gave all to see that come to pass!

And as you read these verses, and maybe they are not to you, but they are very convicting to me!

You see, Paul is saying that He, Silas, and Timothy gave whatever they had, put their lives on the line to see the Thessalonian believers grow, to minister to the body of Christ. They labored, they agonized, they were even in pain day and night because they loved these new believers so much, they were willing to sacrifice their own lives for them.

Let me ask you this. What about you? Are you like Paul?

Now you might say, ***“I am not called to that ministry!”***

I am sorry to say, you are because aren't you a servant of God? Of course you are!

What excuses do you make for not being involved in the body of Christ?

“I'm too busy!”

Or ***“I'm not called to that ministry!”***

Or if you are in a ministry do you fulfill it, or do you just get by doing it? Does someone have to stay on top of you to make sure the work is done?

Did you start out in a ministry strong but now you are just getting by, doing the minimum work, not expanding the ministry or trying to see it grow?

We are servants of God and as servants of God it will cost you something like it did Paul, Silas and Timothy. Are we willing to sacrifice as they did?

Think about it, what if everyone in the body of Christ had that mentality like Paul, Silas and Timothy had, how strong the church would be.

I told you these verses were convicting.

I'm sure you have heard it said before that people don't care what you know until they know how much you care and thus, be a servant of all, it will cost you something but there are great blessings as you step forward and serve!

So we have seen that a faithful servant of Jesus Christ is **BOLD, FAITHFUL, HUMBLE** and is willing to **SACRIFICE** their lives for others!

VERSES 10-12

The fifth point of a faithful servant of Jesus Christ is that Paul was an **EXAMPLE** to them!

It is one thing to talk and talk and talk about how you are to live out your faith, it is another thing to actually live it! And for leaders, this is so important, and we are all leaders as people are watching us live out our faith. What are they seeing?

For Paul, he was their mother, watching over them, feeding them, protecting them.

But now Paul moves from the cherishing role of a mother to the watchful eye of a father and Paul uses these verses to describe a father's role, the one he manifested to the Thessalonians.

First of all, Paul lived "**devoutly**" before these believers. The idea here is that Paul lived "***in a holy manner***" before them and before God!

Then Paul speaks of living "**justly**" or that he dealt righteously before them, he did the right things.

And he lived "**blamelessly**" before them, his reputation stood the test!

What a wonderful example they were to the Thessalonians, like a loving father who was watching over them and living what they said they believed and what they taught the Thessalonian believers!

Not only that but He also says that a father is to “**exhort**” or PARAKALEO in the Greek and it means, “*to call alongside.*” A father is to come alongside a child to guide them as they grow.

Next, a father is to “**comfort**” or encourage his children. Let’s face it, our children face many obstacles in life, and they need to be encouraged even in their failures, to learn lessons of faith.

And lastly, a father is to “**charge everyone**” or to single them out personally if they were not walking correctly, there would be consequences to their actions and a father was not to let them get away with evil. Or, on the other end of the spectrum, to encourage them as they are doing well!

Paul saw himself as a spiritual father and thus, his behavior toward them was accordingly.

Just like any father wanting to see their children walk worthy of God, that was Paul’s desire for the Thessalonians.

It is as John said in III John 4, “**I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.**”

So a faithful servant of Jesus Christ is to be **BOLD, FAITHFUL, HUMBLE, SACRIFICIAL**, and an **EXAMPLE** to others!

Now, in I Thessalonians 2:13-16 we move into a section dealing with **FRUITFUL MINISTRY!** Listen to what Paul says.

VERSE 13

Here is what made this group of believers strong, healthy. They not only heard the Word of God, but they believed it.

The Word of God was not just received into their mind, but it sank deep into their heart and became part of their lives!

For the last 24 years now, my prayer as I have taught the Word of God is that it would not only be information for you to grow by but life transformation as you apply the things of God to your life and walk accordingly!

That by the illumination of the Holy Spirit the Word of God would be opened up to you and you would respond accordingly, you would grow!

And yes, that does not always happen, but it is not God's Word that is dead, but the person who is listening seems to be.

I have heard people say, "***I already heard that book taught, I don't need to hear it again!***"

Foolishness! What you are implying is that the Spirit of God is dead, God's Word is not living and powerful, and you already heard from God and don't need to hear it again.

Not only that, but today we have pastors who have stopped teaching the Word of God to their people, the ones that God has entrusted to them and instead are giving the words and wisdom of man.

But listen to what Paul said here in this verse, **“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.”** I Thessalonians 2:13. May we have ears that hear and hearts that are open to what God is saying to us!

VERSES 14-16

Look at what the Word of God opened up by the Spirit of God did in their lives. They not only were saved but God transformed their lives! And Paul is testifying to the validity and genuineness of their faith because they became the targets of persecution from their countrymen just like the Jewish Christians in Judea became the brunt of persecution from their non-believing Jewish countrymen.

Paul warned Timothy of this very thing as he said, **“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”** II Timothy 3:12.

Why in the world do we think we can live in peace in this world that is hostile, is against what we believe?

Folks, if the world is at enmity with God, if they hate the true and living God, then as His servants they are at enmity with us!

Jesus warned us in John 15:18-20, **“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”**

Don't be surprised when it happens, it will!

Now is Paul being anti-Semitic when he says that the Jews not only killed their own prophets, but the Lord Jesus Christ?

Not at all, he is just affirming a fact.

And the reality is, we all put Jesus up on that cross, our sin is what put Him up there as He paid in full the penalty for our sin! So it was not just the Jews or the Romans, it was all of us!

Now the Jews had a problem with this salvation by grace through faith in Jesus as Hiebert tells us, “The Jews’ opposition to the work of the missionaries among the Gentiles was not due to the fact that they were seeking to win Gentiles. The Jews themselves were vigorously engaged in this period of their history in actively proselyting Gentiles. Their fierce opposition was due to the fact that Christian missionaries offered salvation to Gentiles without demanding that they first become Jews.”

The end result for not only the Jews who reject Jesus but also for Gentiles, all who reject Him, is that they will face the wrath of God! They will spend an eternity in the Lake of Fire! That is the reality.

Now as we read on and finish this chapter, Paul is going to speak about his failure to return to Thessalonica.

Why was this important?

Because his critics were accusing him of not caring about or loving these Thessalonian believers. They may have been making false accusations that Paul was a coward and was afraid to show his face in the city of Thessalonica because of the fierce persecution he faced the last time he was there. So Paul is going to deal with this issue so there is no confusion.

VERSES 17-20

Make no mistake about it, Paul's desire was to go and see the Thessalonian believers once again, but as he wrote this letter from Corinth, he saw the roadblocks that Satan was putting up preventing him from going there.

So did Paul give up?

We might but not Paul, he saw ways of getting around those roadblocks by sending Timothy there. And according to Acts 20:1-5, Paul did return there for a time.

Now, in regard to these roadblocks of Satan, listen to what Spurgeon has to say. He wrote,

Supposing that we have ascertained that hindrances in our way really come from Satan, **WHAT THEN?** I have but one piece of advice, and that is, go on, hindrance or no hindrance, in the path of duty as God the Holy Ghost enables you.

- Spurgeon

Now we are not told what this roadblock was, if it was sickness, we just don't know. But William MacDonald offers this insight to us as he wrote,

Perhaps one way is this: when we know that we are in the will of God, any hindrances that arise are not the Spirit's work but the devil's. Also, Satan can be expected to hinder whenever God is blessing. But God always overrules Satan's opposition. In this particular case, Paul's inability to go to Thessalonica resulted in the writing of this Letter. The Letter, in turn, has resulted in glory to God and blessing to us.

- William MacDonald

Now yes, there was this long distance that may have separated Paul from the Thessalonian believers, but he wanted them to know that he would never forget them; they were his glory and joy!

Paul knew that even if he could not see them again in this life, they will rejoice together in heaven as the Lord comes back for His Bride, the Church.

And, as we will see with this letter, every chapter ends with the return of the Lord. Is that important? Some would have you believe that it is not, but there are over 500 references to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in the Bible, I think it is important!

This is a powerful chapter on serving faithfully, fully giving your life so others may grow.

We saw that a faithful servant of Jesus Christ will serve by being - ***BOLD, FAITHFUL, HUMBLE, SACRIFICIAL***, and an ***EXAMPLE*** to others!

Paul, Silas and Timothy have shown us what true servants are like, they are willing to give their all for people! May we do the same!

“Every man who preaches the Gospel should carefully read *this* chapter and examine himself by it. Most preachers, on reading it conscientiously, will either give up their place to others, or purpose to do the work of the Lord more fervently for the future.” (Clarke)

As we move into chapter 3 of I Thessalonians this evening we are going to see a church that was established through the Word of God and through prayer.

And Paul will share with us Timothy’s mission trip to Thessalonica in I Thessalonians 3:1-10, and then Paul’s specific prayer for them in I Thessalonians 3:11-13.

So let’s move into I Thessalonians chapter 3 this evening.

I THESSALONIANS 3

VERSES 1-5

If you remember from Acts chapter 17, Paul was waiting in Athens alone and then Timothy and Silas came to Him there, (Acts 17:14-15), and after a period of time Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, (Acts 18:5), and Silas went somewhere in Macedonia, perhaps Philippi and Paul was **“left in Athens alone.”**

It speaks of leaving a loved one behind at death and that is how Paul felt.

Satan may have put up roadblocks, but Timothy got through to establish or strengthen them in the faith and to encourage them. You see, first you have to be established in the right things before you can be encouraged otherwise it is just a false encouragement.

You may be wondering why was Paul concerned about their stability?

The answer is simple. It was because of the afflictions, the hard times that had come upon these believers and Paul was concerned that these things would **“shaken”** their faith.

The Greek word for “**shaken**” is SAINO, (sah’-ee-no) and the idea here is that of a dog wagging his tail.

What does that mean?

Simply, the Devil is going to come along and try to flatter you with a promise of ease if you listen to him and move off the course that God has set for you. That is why we need to be established in the truth so that we will not be shaken, but we will be encouraged in the faith.

Too often today we hear teachers tell us that God wants us to be happy, healthy and wealthy, but that is not what the Scriptures teach us. God wants us to be holy and He will use the things that happen in our lives to make us more dependent upon Him, to make us more holy!

It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 4:16-18, “**Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.**”

Perspective is everything!

And you can see in I Thessalonians 3:4 that Paul had warned them ahead of time of the difficult times that would come upon them for their faith, not just outward persecution but even physical problems.

Why does God allow that to happen to us?

I think A. W. Tozer hit the nail on the head when he said, “Before God can use a person greatly, he must allow that person to be hurt deeply.”

God is not being mean to us; it is just that we can't comfort others with the comfort of God unless we have been comforted by Him ourselves!

Now we should deal with this tribulation, this persecution that comes upon our lives. What do these things produce in our lives?

I think they produce several things in our lives and hopefully, as we look at this, as we are going through tough times, we will not be disheartened!

First of all, *IT SHOWS US THAT OUR FAITH IS REAL*, as Peter tells us in I Peter 1:6-7, **“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”**

Also, *WE CAN BRING THE COMFORT AND THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF GOD TO OTHERS*, as I have said. Paul tells us in II Corinthians 1:3-4, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”**

It also helps us *TO DEVELOP ENDURANCE, PERSEVERANCE*, as Paul tells us in Romans 5:3, **“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance.”**

We are also told that *IT GIVES US BOLDNESS*, as we are told in Acts 4:29, **“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word.”**

And in Acts 8:2-3 we are told, “**And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.**”

Also, *IT HELPS REMOVE IMPURITIES FROM OUR LIVES*, as Job 23:10 tells us, “**But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.**”

And I am sure there are more, but that gives to you some of the reasons that these things come upon us and hopefully it will encourage us as we go through them.

And as we see in I Thessalonians 3:5, Paul wanted to know how they were doing, how their faith was holding up.

Keep in mind Paul had little success in Athens as he spoke to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

Then in Corinth, the armpit of the world you might say, totally wicked, Paul was depressed, he was down.

And Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to make sure they were okay, to build them up in the faith.

Folks, I don't care how godly you think you are, when you are suffering affliction you need other godly people to come alongside and encourage you.

That is why when we are going through tough times the enemy gets us to isolate ourselves.

Don't fall prey to his schemes, remain in the Body of Christ as Paul admonishes us in Hebrews 10:24-25, “**And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**”

How were they doing? Was Paul's labor in vain? Look at what Paul says of the report that Timothy brought back regarding their faith.

VERSES 6-7

I think I can safely say that we all like good news. And Paul was not an exception here. When Paul heard what great things were happening with the believers in Thessalonica it encouraged him.

He saw that their faith was real, and it was manifested with that *AGAPE* love or that unconditional love that can only come from God. It is not an earthly love, but a supernatural love and it was being manifested in the lives of the believers in Thessalonica!

So as down in the dumps as Paul was, this good news lifted his spirits knowing they were doing well.

It is as Proverbs 25:25 tells us, "**As cold water to a weary soul, So is good news from a far country.**"

It is as Spurgeon wrote, "Never is the servant of God so full of delight as when he sees that the Holy Spirit is visiting his hearers, making them to know the Lord, and confirming them in that heavenly knowledge. On the other hand, if God does not bless the word of his servants it is like death to them. To be preaching and to have no blessing makes them heavy of heart: the chariot-wheels are taken off, and they drag heavily along: they seem to have no power nor liberty."

How true that is. Their faith was real, and that real faith is seen because faith without works is dead!

VERSES 8-10

If they were doing so well why was Paul praying for areas they were lacking in? Because none of us are perfect and to be complacent means you are spiritually dead, you are not growing!

Not only prayer, but Paul wanted to see them so that he could teach them and help them to grow as well.

And again, this is something that is lacking in the church today, the teaching of God's Word and then we wonder why some are not growing, some are not maturing, they support things that are unbiblical!

Let me share this with you, because this is a common theme in churches today, moving away from the teaching of God's Word and giving people what they want to hear, and it is not sound doctrine.

This is what one person wrote,

After listening to your Bible studies, I now understand the importance of attending a church that teaches the whole counsel of God's word. Unfortunately, my church has changed over the years from teaching the Bible, to just entertaining people with spiritual junk food. After learning so much from your ministry, I decided to approach my pastor asking him to return to in-depth teaching. He started yelling at me, accusing me of challenging his authority. He refused to even consider what I had to say. I don't know what to do now. Should I leave my church or work to improve it?

- <http://bit.ly/2Eahu7u>

That is an easy one, you leave the church. If you are not being fed, then you will starve to death! I know, not a popular statement, but it is true!

I had someone say to me that Jesus did not teach verse by verse through the Bible. Actually, this person was quoting his pastor when he was questioned why they only do topical studies!

I found that an interesting statement because in the synagogue, they would read a portion of Scripture and then expound on it. That is teaching verse by verse as they went through the Old Testament!

Not only that, but we see Paul tell the Ephesian pastors in Acts 20:24-28, **“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”**

Paul taught them the *WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD*, not just a topic here and a topic there.

And then Paul tells them that they are accountable to God in regard to the people that He has entrusted to them, the ones that He purchased with the shedding of His blood!

Don't mess with God's people, feed them the truths of God found in the Word of God, the whole counsel of God from Genesis to Revelation!

Now some may wonder why this is so important. But listen carefully as Paul goes on to say in Acts chapter 20, **“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”**
Acts 20:29-31.

In other words, the best way to prevent false teaching, false doctrine from coming into a church is by giving the people a healthy shot of the Word of God!

Otherwise, as Paul said in Ephesians 4:14-16, **“that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”**

If we don't know the truths of God found in the Word of God, we are open to the winds of doctrine to blow into our lives and into our churches and many will set their sails up and be blown away with this garbage.

I have seen it far too often today!

And it is the trickery of men, they are crafty, deceitful in their plotting and they take so many away from what God has said in His Word! Be careful. Be warned!

VERSES 11-13

Paul begins this prayer by asking God to direct his way to Thessalonica, to open a door for him to see them again, and the Lord eventually did!

And then, in I Thessalonians 3:12, Paul speaks of them increasing and abounding in love!

Did this church lack love?

No, I don't believe they did, but when compared to the love of God, we are all in need of more love!

Let me ask you this, what is the identifying mark of a Christian?

Carrying a big King James Bible?

No!

Wearing Christian tee-shirts?

No!

Going to church?

No!

Tithing?

No!

Then what is it? ***LOVE – AGAPE LOVE!***

Jesus put it this way in John 13:34-35, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

And let me say this. Love is a *fruit* of the Spirit and not a *gift* of the Spirit!

Is there a difference?

You be there is!

You see, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given and can be used immediately!

But, the fruit of the Spirit is that Christ-like character and that does not come instantaneously, but it grows over time as we walk with the Lord and we yield to the Holy Spirit's control over our lives.

And thus, when Paul is calling for them to increase and abound in love, he is referring to their growth in Jesus, it is the sanctification process and that will not be completed until we go home to be with the Lord!

And let me say this. Our love needs to go far beyond the family of God, or it is shallow.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:43-48, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”**

Again, that is a love that comes from God as we yield to His Spirit!

And as Paul closes this chapter we see that he wanted their hearts set apart from the world's standards, the world's ideas and unto God!

It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 6:14-18, **“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.’”**

And as he ends Paul speaks of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, not the Rapture here.

You see, the saints of God will meet the Lord in the air at the Rapture of the Church, but at the Second Coming the saints will come with Him to establish His Kingdom on the Earth!

Let me close with these words from Paul in I Thessalonians 5:23-24, as he tells us, **“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.”**

Praise the Lord for the work He is doing in us and through us, may we not get in His way or prevent Him from what He wants to do!