

1 Thessalonians 2
A Continuation of the Study of the Formation
Of the Church

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It is imperative in studying this epistle to bear in mind the entire story of the development of the church as revealed in the book of Acts. The church is God's agency to fulfill His mission on earth:

Matt 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Matt 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

1Tim 3:15 "but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."

The church is the called out people of God who are devoted to the "Great Commission", which is to make disciples of children of God, to baptize them in the name of the Trinity, and to teach the commands of Jesus, knowing that He is always with us. The local church is to first of all carry out the Great Commission within the group of its local members and then to do the same to other children of God who are outside of the local church. The study of Acts and then the study of this epistle and the other writings of Paul that we will study are excellent companion studies of the establishment and the function of the church. We have seen already how the church at Thessalonica exhibited these characteristics of the church. Now we also need to continually pray for wisdom that we too might be worthy of being called a church of God.

Like any human organization the church also has leaders and these leaders are representative of the function of the local church. The church has a pastor, elders, deacons, and teachers all of whom are called to properly represent the actions of Jesus Christ in the local church. In our time we have seen the sins of many local leaders revealed in the public eye. Although no human is perfect, all church members and especially its leaders need to be aware that their sins reflect on the church. The world is quick to condemn Christian organizations and when a church leader is revealed to be practicing sin the entire church is condemned by them. Everything that we do or think and everywhere that we go reflects on our inner character and, in the eyes of the world, on the Christian faith that we profess.

In the days of Paul, sin was rampant in the religious organizations of his world. The religious leaders taught that sexual interaction was the way for people to get closer to the gods and form some sort of mystical union with them. Since the leaders were the stated

representatives of their gods, sexual interaction with them was of the highest regard. The temple ceremonies often consisted of times for orgies and the leaders would engage prostitutes so that same-sex unions could be encountered. The leaders would also teach that true “believers” would be rewarded by the gods with power and riches. The promise of earthly rewards was very compelling to the people. Do these practices sound familiar in 2006? Since Paul was the leader of this new “religion” the other leaders were jealous of him and attacked his character so Paul now defends his character and his motives since the actions of the leader are so reflective of the ideals of the organization. In this instance the organization is the church of God and it is imperative that its leaders be pure in motive.

1Thess 2:1 “For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,

1Thess 2:2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

1Thess 2:3 For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit;

1Thess 2:4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts.”

Paul then begins this second chapter with a defense of himself and his motives. He has already praised the church for its witnesses of the true faith. He can then say in verse 1 above that his work was not in vain because of the actions of the church members. In verse two, Paul uses two words to describe how he was mistreated in Philippi: suffered and mistreated. Suffered refers to physical abuse whereas mistreated refers to public or legal abuse that was intended to humiliate the person and the missionaries were treated to both actions. Luke records these episodes in Acts 16:16-24 and you may read the accounts in my writings (<http://livingtheology.com/Acts%2016.html>). Even after they had been so mistreated they still boldly presented the Gospel to them. When we know that we speak the words of God we can certainly be bold in our actions because we are representatives of the creator and ruler of the universe. The word “exhortation” means an urgent appeal that is rooted in a reference to judgment. Paul is telling them that his appeal to them is not rooted in any error, impurity, or by way of any deceit. His use of these words is indicative of his knowledge of the actions of the false leaders and how they deceive their people as noted in my introduction to this discussion. Paul refers in other writings of his of the importance to be a proper representative of the Word of God:

*1Tim 6:3 “If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,
1Tim 6:4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,
1Tim 6:5 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.”*

*1Tim 6:20 "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"--
1Tim 6:21 which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you."*

2Tim 1:13 "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

2Tim 1:14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you."

2Tim 2:15 "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."

Paul was thus very aware of the importance of properly presenting the words of God and not to misuse them in any way that might bring glory to him.

"Impurity" translates the Greek word "akatharsias" and we can understand that word with just a little understanding of Greek. When an "a" is put in front of a word it means that the main component of the word is to be understood as its opposite. Therefore "amuse" means without knowledge or understanding. From the main component of the word we can pronounce it and see that we get our word "catharsis" from it. We understand "catharsis" to be a purifying or cleansing experience. Therefore the word translated as "impurity" means to not produce any purifying or to introduce an idea or concept that actually deletes purity from the concept. As stated in the introduction to this section the imparting of "akatharsias" into the religious practices of Paul's day was very common and people were accusing Paul of similar actions. As the leader, Paul had to defend his actions as not being as those of his contemporaries.

Paul then goes on to say that his work is approved by God. Paul was not self-approved but tested and sent by God. He was entrusted with the Gospel and he knew what an awesome responsibility he had.

Acts 9:15 "But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;"

1Cor 15:10 "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

[I love the above and call it the "Popeye" theology of Paul and some of you may understand that in remembering Popeye saying "I yam what I yam".]

Eph 3:8 "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

Eph 3:9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things;

Eph 3:10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”

[We see again here that the church is the arm of God reaching out to the world as discussed briefly in the introduction to this chapter.]

1Tim 1:11 “according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.”

Titus 1:3 “but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior;”

In the last verse above Paul makes it clear that he is not judged by men but by God. Of course that is also what we should say as we realize the awesome truth that we, as children of God, are responsible to Him and judged by Him. It is an awesome responsibility to be a teacher of the Gospel:

James 3:1 “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.”

False teachers and leaders are usually recognized as people who are primarily seeking approval by men. They seek this recognition by offering false promises. Leaders and teachers of the Christian faith are not seeking approval by man and often the true teaching of the word of God produces the same response as that received by our Lord Jesus. People do not want to hear that God is judging them for being practioners of what He hates. People who are not chosen by God as His children want to make up their own rules and twist even Scripture toward their interpretations that are not correct.

**1Thess 2:5 “For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed-- God is witness--
1Thess 2:6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.”**

Knowing Paul somewhat from my studies of him, I cannot imagine him ever coming to the people with a flattering speech seeking glory for him from men. There were false prophets who were seeking worldly rewards so Paul had to make sure that the Thessalonians knew he was not such a person. As an apostle he could have asserted his authority but he never did so. He was not impressed with himself and neither should we be for God has chosen the simple of the world to proclaim the majesty of Him (see Scripture quoted on pages 2, 3). Today there also are false Christian leaders who are seeking fame and fortune for themselves and we must all be careful not to be taken in by their false promises of such fortunes for us. The “real” Christian will keep his eye upon the kingdom of God and seek to store riches there. When we see a need and we have the resources to accommodate that need, we should do so in a way that does not bring in glory to us here. I have seen items in a church building with the name of the given on

them and when I see that I do not think that the person stored any treasures in heaven. As fallen humans we must be careful to curb our tendencies to want people to praise us.

1Thess 2:7 “But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.

Paul’s reference to the gentle caring of a nursing mother is so appropriate for he was dealing with people who had just been born again. They had been born again as children of God and now they needed to be treated as new children. They first had to be fed the milk of the Word and then introduced to solid food and to a growing maturity into the Kingdom of God. A complication exists however in that their minds had already been taught worldly ways and these lessons had to be unlearned. It is very difficult to teach someone how to play a sport if he has already learned muscle memories that are not conducive to playing the sport properly. It may be in the case of new-born children of God that they have been taught spiritual concepts that are incorrect and sometimes it is very difficult to remove those concepts so that the truth can be learned.

Rom 12:2 “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

The transforming process can be painful and even may reveal that the person is really not truly born again but is a pretender.

1John 2:19 “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.”

1Thess 2:8 Having thus a fond affection 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 very dear to us.

1Thess 2:9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.”

Paul’s love for the people given to him by God for fulfilling the great commission was always great as he often referred to them as “his children”. He risked his life many times to disciple and to teach these wonderful fellow members of the Family. I have had a similar feeling over the years for the people that God has brought into my life through the various SS programs and other Bible study groups. Every time that I have had to leave a particular SS class it has pained me considerably. Paul reminds them that he even worked at a profession so that he would not be a financial burden to them. His life was a true reflection of the Gospel in how Paul loved them and gave of himself so that he might properly present the Word of God.

1Thess 2:10 “You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;

**1Thess 2:11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,
1Thess 2:12 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”**

Notice how Paul calls God into the picture as his witness that he had a pious attitude and a high moral life before them. Our actions and our attitudes are very important as people are watching us to see if our professions are affecting our lifestyle. Paul now advances from treating them as a mother to treating them as a father and the difference is significant. Christians need treatments similar to that of a mother and that of a father. The father image is exhorting, encouraging, and imploring the children of God to behave according to God’s standards. The calling of God is always effective and the result is a changed lifestyle. The kingdom of God is simultaneously here and will come in all of its glory. The kingdom was initiated on earth with the coming of the Son:

Luke 1:78 “Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us,

Luke 1:79 To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Matt 4:17 “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The new kingdom was recognized by the worship of another king:

Acts 17:7 “and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”

Paul also is reminding them of the kingdom to come as he frequently points people to the bliss ahead as an incentive to Godly living now.

Rev 7:16 “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;

Rev 7:17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.”

I know that I think of the world to come knowing that the following is indeed true:

Rom 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

1Thess 2:13 “And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

What a difference it is to receive a philosophical way of life only from men and to receive it from God! The wisdom of man is not to be compared to that of God and the false philosophies of the world lead many people into a life with no ultimate meaning.

Col 2:8 “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

I do not know how to describe the certainty in my being when I first received the wisdom of God into my heart. I felt like a curtain had been removed from my vision and I was able to finally see reality in a way that changed my life forever. These people also received that reality in the same way as evidenced by the changes in their lives.

**1Thess 2:14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews,
1Thess 2:15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men,
1Thess 2:16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.”**

Here we see the word “for” and we have to see why it is there. Surely it refers back to verse 13 for their actions are reflective of their changed hearts. Since the other churches had received persecution their reaction is worthy of imitation for the development of the church. Similarly today we can look at churches that are receiving persecution for the sake of Jesus Christ and we can imitate their Christian behavior of forgiveness and even love for our enemies. Their reaction was not as the Lord described in:

*Matt 13:20 “And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy;
Matt 13:21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.”*

Surely many of us have seen people who joyously seemed to “join the church” during a revival but then when people in their work place began to criticize them because of their new affiliation they stopped participating in the congregation of believers. These people received a lot more strict persecution than just gossip but they continued persevered.

In verses 15 and 16 we see a change in Paul’s attitude toward the persecuting Jews. Probably Paul is reacting due to an accumulation of persecution that he received from the Jews: chased out of Damascus (Acts 9:23-25) and Jerusalem (Acts 9:29,30), driven out of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:45, 46, 50), forced out of Iconium (Acts 14:2, 5, 6), chased him to Lystra leaving him stoned for dead (Acts 14:19), chasing him from Thessalonica (Acts 17:5, 10), then in Corinth where he is writing this letter (Acts 18:6, 12, 13). Then he sees the actions against the Thessalonians now and their reactions that are

praiseworthy. All of these actions including the killing of Jesus Christ led him to state a rather caustic discourse against these Jewish advocates. Although their actions seem to be hindering the receiving of the Gospel by the Gentiles God is still sovereign and He will get His message to His chosen children. But surely Paul is correct about the wrath of God and his last sentence in these verses is terrifying for them.

1Thess 2:17 “But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while-- in person, not in spirit-- were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.

1Thess 2:18 For we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, more than once-- and yet Satan thwarted us.

1Thess 2:19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?

1Thess 2:20 For you are our glory and joy.”

Paul then begins this last section with the word “but”, which conveys the meaning that in spite of the actions of the Jewish advocates, he still wants to go to them. Timothy and Silas had gone back to the Thessalonians but Paul had not yet gone back to them. He makes it plain that his not coming was not because he did not want to see them. He fervently wanted to see them. Some today do not believe in an actual Satan but he is very real and has been active in the world against God since creation. Although we do not know the details of Satan’s actions against Paul going to the Thessalonians we can be assured that the source was as Paul stated. We also know that Satan will have a fierce human representative causing problems just before the return of Jesus:

2Thess 2:3 “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

2Thess 2:4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

2Thess 2:5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?

2Thess 2:6 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed.

2Thess 2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

2Thess 2:8 And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;

2Thess 2:9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders,

2Thess 2:10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

2Thess 2:11 And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false,

2Thrs 2:12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.”

Paul ends his defense of his work with them by stating that in the second coming of our Lord Jesus his rewards will be based upon the works of the people that he has discipled

and taught the commands of Jesus. He is not bragging about his works but giving the praise and glory to God for the work that He has done through him. We can all similarly say that our crowns in heaven will be based upon the works that we have allowed God to propagate through us.

Matt 6:20 "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;"

References

- 1.) "1 & 2 Thessalonians", John McArthur, Moody Press, 2002.
- 2.) "The Expositor's Bible Commentary Volume 11", Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, 1978.