

August 20, 2023

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 NIV 1984

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. *14* For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, *15* who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men *16* in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

Scriptures for further study:

2 Timothy 3:12

1 Peter 2:21

Matthew 10

Philippians 1:29-30

Romans 8:18

1 Peter 4:12-14

1 Peter 5:10-11

Matthew 5:11-12

Hebrews 10:32-36



Stand Strong **1 Thessalonians 2:13-16**

BIG IDEA: Faithful and genuine gospel living means standing strong in the face of cultural opposition or persecution.

OUTLINE

1. Getting the Text in View
2. The Gospel:
 - a. Faithfully Preached
 - b. Fully Received and Accepted
 - c. Fearlessly Lived out
3. Stand Strong Amidst Persecution:
 - a. Current Cultural Headwinds
 - b. Forms of Persecution
 - c. Wilberforce Moment or Bonhoeffer Moment?
 - d. How Will We Respond
4. Steps to Take:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: Paul, by way of thankfulness for the Thessalonians, reminds the church that the word that he preached was God's Word, which it is because it "is a work in you believers"; it is accomplishing in the church faith, hope, and love. Only men who had seen the risen Jesus are apostles. Paul's apostolic teaching really is the "word of God," and should be received as being from God himself which is at work in you.

Imitate. Children not only share physical attributes of their parents, but they often share their mannerisms as well. The Thessalonian Christians suffered persecution for Jesus from their own countrymen. The non-Jew Thessalonians were stirred up against the Christians by Jewish opponents of the gospel. Paul sees what happened to the missionaries in Thessalonica as the latest in a long series of examples of Jewish hostility to the word of God.

-Adapted from the ESV Study Bible online

version

Praise to Jesus. Praise God that we are not left to ourselves to discover truth. God has given us his very word (the Bible) in order that we might know everything necessary for saving faith as well as the daily living out of our faith.

Repentance through Jesus. Spend some time asking God to forgive (and renew) those areas of your life in which we are not allowing the word of God to be "at work in us."

Consecration for Jesus. By the grace of God, recommit yourself to standing strong in your faith and ask God to make you bolder for Christ, come what may.

DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. In what way(s) are we seeing the Christian faith under greater pressure and even attack here in America today? In what way(s) are you perhaps experiencing this personally?
2. The Thessalonians not only heard the word of God, they had also fully accepted it, which is to say they were obediently living out their faith. If you are already a believer, in what ways is your faith currently being lived out and demonstrated? In what areas are you growing? In what areas do you need to be growing more?
3. In general, how effectively do you think the American church is doing in the face of great cultural forces of opposition? Can you think of negative examples of Christians being too complacent or even compromised when it comes to cultural change? Can you think of positive examples of Christians being courageous in standing for their faith?
4. Of the suggested practical steps to be taken in preparing for or dealing with persecution, which steps seem most helpful to you? Are there other additional steps that you can think of to take?

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. What is the “word of God” to which Paul mentions in our passage this week? *(In 1:5-6 Paul wrote that this word is the gospel of Jesus.)*

2. What reason did Paul give in verse 13 for being thankful for the Christians in Thessalonica? *(Paul thanked God for the Thessalonian Christians for accepting the gospel as a “word of God” and not as a “word of men”. Talk with your children about the importance of understanding the gospel as from God and not from humans. The divine origin means that it comes with His power. (Romans 1:16)*

3. What did Paul mean when he wrote in verse 13 that the gospel “is at work in you believers”? *(He wrote in verse 14 that they “became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea”. He goes back to a point he made in chapters 1 and 2 that true Christians will bear Godly fruit in their lives such as the faith, hope, and love (1:3) Paul also wrote that the Thessalonian Christians persevered through persecution).*

a. It might be helpful to play a game of Simon Says to teach your children about imitation.

4. What would it look like for the gospel to be at work in our lives today? *(Try to make this as personal as possible for you and your family. In other words, talk with how your family would treat each other if the gospel is at work in you. Another example would be to talk about how they might act in school or at play.)*

Scriptures for further study:

Romans 1:16

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Philippians 2:13

John 16:33

FOR STUDENTS

1. Gospel living Thessalonian-style looks like a work of faith, a labor of love, and patient hope in following Jesus even when its hard no matter what everyone in your world will think, say, or do. Pause a minute to pray. A nickname for someone who "everyone" wants to avoid is "pothole". Imagine that you live in Thessalonica. Your family learned about Jesus last week. Now your following Christ. It's lunchtime. Someone at the table says, "Lookout y'all pothole is heading our way." What would you do? Discuss all the ways that you could respond in light of your faith in Jesus. What verse(s) from 1 Thessalonians 1 & 2 can guide how to respond?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13. Discuss some differences between reading a novel and reading the Bible. A friend yours (you're still a student in Thessalonica) saw you reading your Bible during study hall. She wants to know why you are reading it. What would you say? Now she wants to read it too! How would you help her see the difference between reading the Bible and something else?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16. Did you know that in Thessalonica, it was normal to worship many gods? (Continue to imagine you're a student in Thessalonica and you are starter on the basketball team.) When you started following Christ, you saw the gods everyone worshipped for what they really were: man-made wooden and stone statues. At dinner last night, the family devotion was about the Ten Commandments. Next day, right before the tip-off, the principal of the school welcomes everybody and then does what he always does at Thessalonica High which is to ask everyone to take a knee to pray to Nike; the goddess of victory. What are your options?
4. When you are ridiculed for going to sit with "Pothole", when people throw food at you and boo you off the court for refusing to take a knee what verses from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians can assure, encourage and even give you boldness in the face of disapproval?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6. How can you live out your faith in the places where God has placed you? Who are the people in your life whose Christian faith and love for Jesus you can look to encourage you to live for Jesus Christ?

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. Paul is thankful that the Thessalonians are true believers; he is encouraged by the fact that they have heard and received the word of God, and they are now faithfully living out their faith.

Question: What about you? (Do some honest self-evaluation.) Do you believe that the Bible is in fact God's word? Have you truly put your faith in God? Do you see evidence in your life that your faith is real and is being lived out faithfully?

2. When we become true believers, we will inevitably face challenges and even persecution.

Question: Did anyone ever explain that to you before? If you are not yet a believer, would you still be willing to believe and follow Jesus? Have you first counted the cost?

3. If you are a believer and yet you are facing no opposition as a result of your faith, is it possible that your faith is too private? Is it possible you are trying to fit in with everyone else in the world and perhaps compromising your faith?

4. In what ways are you seeing Christians around the world more under attack these days? In what ways are you seeing Christians in America facing more hostility?

5. As a church full of believers, what are some ways we can better encourage and support each other to stand strong amidst cultural forces of opposition?

A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica



Sunflowers, Vincent Van Gough, 1888

About the artist and painting: In 1888, the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh moved to southern France with a dream. He wanted to establish an art community where painters could live, work, and inspire one another. One of his mentors, a man he deeply respected, Paul Gauguin, agreed to come and live in this community. As a symbol of his thankfulness and happiness, Van Gogh painted a series of sunflower paintings and hung them in his room. The sunflower meant to reflect his surprising joy towards achieving a dream.

The apostle Paul was probably not an artist but he did produce a letter expressing his surprising joy, his thankfulness, and happiness. This letter was his “sunflower” to the church Thessalonica. It’s Paul’s verbal painting of Gospel Gratitude. What are things you a most grateful for in your life? Has the Gospel taken root in your heart? If so, what fruits of gratitude are being produced and overflowing in your life as a result of Jesus?

In his opening words from Paul to the Thessalonians, he writes:

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,
3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. The same faith, hope, and love that made a difference in the lives of believers then can make a difference in your life now. **“I’m excited for what God has in store for us First Presbyterian Church, as the Spirit washes us in these words of Gospel gratitude. May Christ be our hope for the world to come, our faith for today, and our love for a lifetime”** Pastor Bill Pardue

The purpose of 1 Thessalonians:

“A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica”

"The purpose of 1 Thessalonians is for Paul to convey to the Thessalonians how encouraged he is by the good report about them and to deal with other aspects of the news brought by Timothy." - Cara, 1 and 2 Thess. 22-23

Paul writes to express his GRATITUDE for the firm faith of the church and their expression and commitment to brotherly love. At the same time, he desires to see the church grow in holiness and provides information and encouragement concerning the hope we have in the certain and imminent return of Jesus Christ.

"The concern Paul had for this congregation was so overwhelming he decided to send Timothy back to the city to 'strengthen and encourage' the believers in their faith and to 'find out about' their faith...1 Thessalonians was written after Timothy arrived in Corinth to report his findings to Paul...He brought good news of the faith, love, and steadfastness of the congregation despite hardships. - Green, PNTC, 52.