

## WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY THE 1 THESSALONIANS SERIES

### COMMENTARY ON MESSAGE #1

January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Life sure can be discouraging at times! This is because we live in a fallen world.

**NOTE:** The term *fallen world* refers to the current state of the created world as a result of Adam's sin. Because Adam represented the human race before God, his sin brought a universal curse upon the world. This is why there are diseases, disabilities, hurricanes, famines, droughts and other calamities in the physical realm of nature. This is also why people sin against each other and hurt each other. It is even why our emotions can plunge us into depression, worry, sorrow and anger. Yes, life in this fallen world can leave us discouraged!

However, life can also bring tremendous blessings our way. This is because, as Christians, God Himself accompanies us along the pathway of life's journey. When we enter into a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, we can begin investing our lives in things which truly have **eternal** value and purpose. The ability to view life with this "bigger picture" in mind will help us not only endure tough times, it will help us live with hope and with a vision for the future that can overcome any obstacle.

**Q1:** What personal experience of living in this fallen world has been the most discouraging for you?

**Q2:** What is the greatest blessing in being a Christian?

And so we begin this study of I Thessalonians entitled **WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY**. The church in Thessalonica was an exciting place to be. People were getting saved and lives were being transformed in amazing ways. At the same time, this young church was facing intense persecution and hardship.

*"You became imitators of us and of the Lord;  
in spite of severe suffering you welcomed the message  
with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."*

I Thessalonians 1:6

**Q3:** Do you believe it is possible to experience joy in times of severe suffering? According to Thessalonians 1:6, what makes joy possible?

So, what was the nature of the suffering encountered by the Thessalonian Christians? As just noted in 1:6, these believers, while still new in their faith, faced intense persecution from those who opposed the gospel of Jesus Christ. We learn more about this in 2:1-2, 14-16. There is much more information about the actual founding of the Thessalonian church in Acts 17:1-10. We will study this passage in the weeks to come as we get further into Paul's letter to the church. By the way, we estimate

that this church was founded in A.D. 50-51. Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica and, after brief stays in Berea and Athens, moved on to Corinth. It was from the city of Corinth that Paul wrote I Thessalonians, probably within six months of having left the new church in Thessalonica.

**Q4:** Have you ever been criticized or mocked by someone because of your faith in Christ?  
How did it affect you?

### WHY DOES PERSECUTION EXIST?

From the earliest days of human history, beginning with Cain's murder of his brother, Abel, in Genesis 4:1-12 (see also I John 3:12) right through to the present day, people who have sincerely loved God have been persecuted. It is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. Steven, the first Christian killed for his faith after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, said this to the religious rulers who were about to execute him:

*"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears!  
You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!  
Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?  
They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One.  
And now you have betrayed and murdered him ..."*  
Acts 7:51-52

I believe there are three fundamental reasons why Christians are persecuted. The first reason, or cause, is Satan. Because Satan hates God, he hates those who love and trust in God. Satan influences people to persecute Christians. In Revelation 2:9-10 and 3:8-9 Jesus used very graphic language when He spoke of the "synagogue of Satan". Jesus was saying that those Jews who continued to reject Him as Messiah and violently persecuted Christians were acting under the influence of Satan who had deceived and blinded them. Most of the persecution against the Thessalonians came from Jews (Acts 17:5-7). Scripture also teaches that Satan influences human governments, so state-sponsored persecution of Christians can also be due to Satan's schemes.

The second source of persecution is the sinful human heart. Because of sin, our natural state is that of rebellion against God's Word. People don't like their sin being exposed. People want others to endorse their sin and even join them in it.

*"They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into  
the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.  
But they will have to give an account to Him  
Who is ready to judge the living and the dead."*  
I Peter 4:4-5

Deep down inside, people have a sense that they are under the judgment of God. God has placed this awareness in each person's heart (see Romans 1:32 ... this is an important verse!) People try very hard to suppress their guilty consciences and they usually resent being reminded of their guilt before a holy God.

A guilty conscience is easily provoked to anger.
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- Q5:** Can you ever recall an incident in your life when someone ridiculed you because you would not participate with them in something you knew was wrong?
- Q6:** Please read I Thessalonians 1:9. Do you think the changed lives of the new Christians contributed to the spirit of persecution they faced?
- Q7:** Why is it likely that persecution against Christians here in America will increase in the days to come?

We have seen that two causes of persecution against Christians are Satan and the sinful nature of the human heart. But a third factor that must be taken into consideration is God Himself. Does that surprise you? No claim is being made here that God is the **cause** of His children being persecuted. But at some level we must recognize that God permits persecution when it contributes to a greater good.

*“You intended to harm me,  
but God intended it for good to accomplish  
what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”*  
Genesis 50:20

Church historians have often pointed out that throughout history Christianity has flourished when persecution was intense. Perhaps the weakness of the church in America is due to the relative ease of living in a generally free and prosperous society.

In the opening sentences of I Thessalonians we can detect at least five reasons these Christian had joy and hope even though their circumstances were difficult. As we already observed in 1:6, the Holy Spirit was at work in their hearts. Secondly, understanding and believing **the gospel** affirms that our sins have been forgiven and that we possess eternal life. The Thessalonians were certainly gospel-centered (1:5). The third reason was the amazing grace of knowing that God had chosen them (1:4). The doctrine of God’s “election” of Christians as special objects of His sovereign love is a delight to those who embrace it. Fourth, they were living in obedience to God’s commands (see 1:2-3) and this is a source of peace and contentment the world will never understand. Finally, the Thessalonian Christians lived in eager expectation of the future return of Jesus Christ (1:10) to take His beloved church to be with Him in Heaven, just as He had promised in John 14:1-3.

**Q8:** Do you remember the five reasons for joy in I Thessalonians 1:1-10? List them here.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**SUMMARY:** As we study I Thessalonians we will discover that the Thessalonian Christians were very committed to following Christ regardless of the obstacles they faced. They were the epitome of the saying, “when the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Their strength and resolve did not come from their own will power; it came from yielding their hearts to God so that the Holy Spirit’s power strengthened their hearts, minds and emotions and gave them radical optimism about the future. We will see how their confidence in the future return of Jesus Christ and the possibility that it could happen at any time inspired them to serve, to worship, to love, to evangelize and to imitate their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, each and every day.

*“We always thank God for all of you,  
mentioning you in our prayers.  
We continually remember before our God and Father  
your work produced by faith,  
your labor prompted by love,  
and your endurance inspired by hope  
in our Lord Jesus Christ.”  
I Thessalonians 1:2-3*

**WARNING:** The careful study of I Thessalonians with an open heart and a teachable mind will radically transform your life!