

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

**COMMENTARY
ON MESSAGE #2
January 14th, 2018**

As American Christians reading I Thessalonians, there is a dynamic that might cause us to miss out on much of the richness of I Thessalonians.

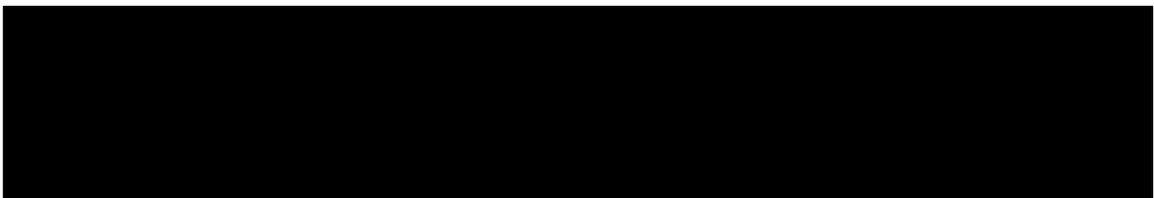
Q1: We are still just getting started in this series, but if you had to venture a guess, what is the “dynamic” that could cause American Christians to miss some of what is in I Thessalonians?

There are two clues in the above statement and question that point to the issue. The first clue is the term **American Christian**, and the second clue is the title “I Thessalonians”. Two thousand years of time separate us from the original recipients of this letter, but time is **not** the biggest difference. The most important difference has to do with persecution, or the lack thereof. The Thessalonian church was less than two years old when they received this letter from Paul (probably less than 18 months old!), and during that whole time they faced intense opposition.

*“For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea,
which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your countrymen
the same thing those churched suffered from the Jews,
who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out.”*

(I Thessalonians 2:14-15A)

Q2: In the world today, where are some places where Christians suffer persecution similar to that experienced by the Thessalonians? Do you ever pray for them?



There is some irony in Paul’s reference to the suffering of the churches back in Judea. What is the irony? Paul, back when he was known as Saul of Tarsus and before he became a Christian, was the chief persecutor of the Christians in Judea! You can read about it in Acts 8:1-3. After he became a follower of Jesus, Paul suffered the very persecution he had helped start (Acts 9:20-30).

As you read and study I Thessalonians and as you seek to **WALK OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY**, you will get much more out of it (wisdom, instruction, inspiration, hope) when you remember the daily reality of persecution faced by those believers. Try to put yourself in their sandals as you read and study this letter, for in that you will discover a deeper richness in God's Word.



“God, why do you allow your children to suffer persecution? Why don't you protect them the same way a human father would protect his children from physical harm or emotional bullying? Why don't you respond to the threats or ridicule against Christians even here in America? It seems as though the more corrupt and immoral people become, and the more they make fun of or mock Christians, the more they get away with it. God, why?”

Q3: Have such thoughts or questions ever been in your mind?

*“But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.
For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong ...
They scoff and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression.
They say, ‘How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?’
This is what the wicked are like – always carefree, they increase in wealth.”*
Psalm 73:2-4, 8, 11-12

Whether it was the Psalmist Asaph in ancient Israel, the Christians in Thessalonica or us today as we see America's rapid moral decline, it can be a frustrating experience watching wickedness and evil gain the upper hand (or so it seems).

Q4: According to Acts 17:5-7, of what did the protesters accuse the Christians? What were they hoping to accomplish?

Q5: According to Acts 17:10, 13-14, under what circumstances did Paul leave Thessalonica and Berea?

I think if we are honest with ourselves, all of us would admit that there have been times when we have questioned God's goodness, His love and concern for us, and His interest in our prayers. And this is not limited to our thoughts and feelings during times of opposition and persecution. Actually, as Christians living in a nation where organized persecution is minimal, our complaints about God (yes, we complain against God every time we question His goodness or love) are more likely to be about health, finances, relationships and life's disappointments.

Still, a thoughtful analysis of the situation in Thessalonians provides us with a radically

different way of viewing hardship. As we consider these things, it should prompt us to view our own challenges and hardships with a spirit of hope and a mindset of peace. Here are 7 things to consider about the situation in Thessalonica:

1. It gave us this awesome letter! If Paul could have remained in Thessalonica, he would have continued to teach them face to face in person. While that would have made them happy, it would have eliminated the need for Paul to write I Thessalonians. This wonderful letter has instructed, encouraged, inspired and blessed countless tens of millions of Christians for 2,000 years in hundreds of languages and dialects ... all because God allowed Paul to be forced out of Thessalonica!
2. Their suffering united them to Christ in an extra-special way as they suffered the way He did (see Philippians 3:10), and this helped them imitate Christ even more.
3. Sin loses its attractiveness during times of persecution or suffering. When you think about it, are we not more likely to give into fleshly temptations during times of comfort, ease and idleness?
4. Persecution and suffering keep us from sinking our roots too deeply in this world which is temporary and is passing away (see I Corinthians 7:31 and I John 2:15-17), and instead helps us be more eternity/heaven minded (see I Thessalonians 1:10 and Philippians 3:18-21).
5. Persecution weeds out people who merely profess Christ but are not true followers of Him (see John 6:66-69; II Timothy 4:10). This purifies the church.
6. Suffering and persecution are God's training grounds, and those who learn from it emerge stronger, with a more vital prayer life and with greater effectiveness in ministering to others when they face tough times (see II Corinthians 1:3-7).
7. Where would we be if Jesus had not died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins? The process of persecution at the hands of His enemies that led to Jesus's suffering on the cross was unfair, dishonest, illegal and morally evil. Yet what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross is the best news in all of human history (see Acts 2:22-24; 4:8-12).

These are seven blessings that came to the Thessalonian Christians as the result of experiencing persecution and hardship.

Q6: Should we feel guilty because we don't face the degree of persecution experienced by the Thessalonians or by Christians today in other parts of the world?

We don't need to feel guilty. Actually we should be thankful for the religious liberty we enjoy.

But to whatever degree we experience loss or hardship because of our choice to follow Christ as we live in this fallen world, to that degree we should be looking for the blessings that always accompany hardship. We just need to look for them. **WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY** isn't always an easy thing to do, but it sure is worth it!

Q7: Is there a hardship or circumstance in your life that you are allowing to interfere with a closer walk with the Lord? What is there in I Thessalonians 1 that can help you triumph over the hardship that is holding you back?