

Adult School of Ministry
Summer 2025
Lesson 9 – July 27, 2025

Faithful in Trying Times

In Christ, believers can stand firm in the face of adversity.

Scriptures: (1) 1 Thessalonians 3:13-20; (2) 1 Thessalonians 3:1–5; (3) 1 Thessalonians 3:6–13

The Lesson Overview: How should Christians respond in times of adversity, especially when the difficulty is because of their faith in Christ? Christians in Thessalonica were being persecuted for their faith, and Paul feared this might cause some of them to return to their pagan ways. When he received Timothy's report that the disciples in Thessalonica remained steadfast in their commitment to Christ, Paul's fears were abated. This good news brought joy to Paul, who rejoiced in God's work among the Thessalonians. Their faithfulness to Christ amid adversity encouraged Paul to continue praying earnestly for them to remain committed to the Lord.

Historical Background: Most of the Gentile Christians in Thessalonica came out of pagan backgrounds. Various pagan religions were embedded into the city's culture, with impressive temples dedicated to various Greek and Roman deities. For the pagans, these gods were not seen as all-powerful beings they could confidently ask to intervene in their lives. Instead, these gods were believed to be emotional and, at times, cruel when not sufficiently appeased. They were very different from the God of the Bible. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian church was based on knowing the true and living God can and does act benevolently on behalf of His children.

Lesson Outline

1. PERSECUTED, YET FAITHFUL - 1 Thessalonians 3:13-20
 - A. God's Word at Work (13-14)
 - B. Satan at Work (15-20)
2. ENCOURAGEMENT AND PERSECUTION - 1 Thessalonians 3:1–5
 - A. Reminder of Teaching About Tribulations (1–4)
 - B. Concern About the Tempter's Effectiveness (5)
3. REPORT OF FAITHFULNESS - 1 Thessalonians 3:6–13
 - A. Timothy's Encouraging Report (6–10)
 - B. Prayer for Continued Faithfulness (11–13)

Discussing The Lesson

1. PERSECUTED, YET FAITHFUL (1 Thessalonians 2:13-20)

A. God's Word at Work - 1 Thessalonians 2:13-14

- 1) In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul returned to themes already addressed in this letter.
- 2) In 1:4-5, he wrote about how the Word of God was received by those in Thessalonica who believed the Gospel.
- 3) Additionally, he returned to the theme of thanksgiving that he offered to God on account of the Thessalonian church (1:2).
- 4) Although repeating themes already addressed, the emphasis in 2:13-14 is on the power of the Word of God working in those who believed the Gospel (v. 13).
- 5) Those who believed the message of Paul and his companions took their message to be "*the word of God*," meaning they believed they were hearing divine revelation through the apostle.
- 6) (Because the word they received came from God, it could powerfully and effectively work in their lives.)
- 7) When the Thessalonians believed in the Word of God, they became believers in Jesus Christ.
- 8) But what followed expressed how their salvation was being worked out continually in the life of the church.
- 9) Verse 14 explains how God's Word continued effectively to work in those who believed.
- 10) The followers of Christ in Thessalonica "*became followers*" of the Christian congregations in Judea who suffered persecution on behalf of Christ by their "*own countrymen*" (v. 14).
- 11) This does not mean the Thessalonian church set out to follow these examples by seeking or inviting opposition.
- 12) Rather, following the example of the Judean Christians means the Thessalonian Christians endured suffering in the same way and for the same reasons as those who preceded them in faithfulness to God.

B. Satan at Work - 1 Thessalonians 2:15-20

- 1) As Paul continued, he noted the kind of opposition that he, the churches of Judea, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Old Testament prophets, and the Thessalonian church had endured.
- 2) In general, the opposition the Judean Christians faced came from certain non-Christian Jewish people who were hostile to the purposes of God (v. 15).
- 3) Likewise, the opposition the Thessalonian Christians faced came from Jewish people who were attempting to hinder the Gentiles from freely hearing (and receiving) the Gospel (v. 16).
- 4) This had been the case in Thessalonica where Jewish opposition to the Gospel forced Paul from the city (Acts 17:5-10).
- 5) The same Jewish persecutors had followed Paul from Thessalonica and drove him from Berea (17:13-15).
- 6) These people followed Paul from one city to the next to oppose him.
- 7) The Jewish opposition trying to prevent Gentiles from hearing the Gospel was the work of sinful people moved and manipulated by Satan.
- 8) Paul noted that after being driven from Thessalonica, he could not return to the church there, although he desired to do so (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18).

- 9) Paul said he was unable to travel to Thessalonica at that time because “*Satan hindered us*” (v. 18).
- 10) The hindrance of Satan came through the work of the Jewish people who opposed the preaching of the Gospel.
- 11) Satan was using religious people to oppose the message that affirmed Jesus Christ as the Messiah who died for the lost and thereby ended the need for sacrifices either in pagan temples or the temple in Jerusalem.
- 12) In verse 19, Paul expressed his deep love for the Thessalonian believers by calling them his “*hope...joy...crown of rejoicing.*”

2. ENCOURAGEMENT AND PERSECUTION (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5)

A. Reminder of Teaching About Tribulations - 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4

- 1) Paul continued to express the deep affection and concern that he, Silas, and Timothy had for the Thessalonian Christians.
- 2) Because the Thessalonian church was suffering persecution because of their faith in Christ, Paul was concerned that they might depart from the Christian faith.
- 3) So, when he and his team “*could no longer forbear,*” they decided it would be best to send Timothy to “*establish*” and “*comfort*” the Thessalonian Christians “*concerning [their] faith*” in Christ (vv. 1-2).
- 4) Paul did not wish to see the Thessalonian believers depart from faith in Christ; therefore, Timothy was sent to strengthen their faith in the Lord to ensure that it was fixed and steadfast.
- 5) In addition, Paul wanted to offer “*comfort*” to the church by sending Timothy to reinforce what Paul had previously taught them about facing tribulations.
- 6) Paul previously taught they must not allow persecution to unsettle their minds or lead them away from their faithfulness to Christ or their confidence in Him.
- 7) He had forewarned them that all true Christians are destined to face suffering for Christ’s sake (vv. 3-4).
- 8) He had instructed the young Christian community that they could expect to face hardship and suffering as followers of Jesus Christ.
- 9) This was something Paul repeatedly told them. Suffering persecution is normal for Christians: “*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God*” (Romans 8:7 NKJV).
- 10) The Thessalonian church understood this based on the teaching of Paul, but they also saw it with their own eyes: “*Even as it came to pass, and ye know*” (1 Thessalonians 3:4).

B. Concern About the Tempter’s Effectiveness - 1 Thessalonians 3:5

- 1) Paul concluded his reason for sending Timothy to the Thessalonian church by noting his concern over the effectiveness of “*the tempter*” in enticing some people to turn from faith in Christ (v. 5).
- 2) Once again, Paul recognized that what was happening to the Thessalonian Christians was the work of Satan, who not only sought to prevent Paul from returning to Thessalonica but was also at work in using persecution to tempt the Christians in Thessalonica to abandon their faith in Jesus Christ.
- 3) Paul had serious concerns that some of the believers in Jesus might turn from the Gospel and to the former pagan beliefs and practices that they had abandoned through faith in Christ.
- 4) If Satan were able to turn the Thessalonian believers from Christ, then Paul and his companions’ labors in the Gospel would have been for nothing (“*in vain,*” v. 5).

- 5) Earlier, Paul stated the Thessalonians' perseverance in faith was the source of his "*glory and joy*" (2:20).
- 6) The Thessalonian Christians' continuance in the faith, and Satan's ineffectiveness in leading them from the faith, was a source of rejoicing for Paul and his companions.
- 7) However, if Satan were successful in turning the Thessalonian Christians back to their former beliefs, then Paul's joy would be silenced, and his heart would be broken.

3. REPORT OF FAITHFULNESS (1 Thessalonians 3:6-13)

A. Timothy's Encouraging Report - 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

- 1) At this point in the letter, Paul relayed to his audience the report that he and Silas had received about the Thessalonian church (v. 6).
- 2) Timothy had been sent to alleviate concerns that some of the disciples in Thessalonica might be departing from the faith amid persecution (vv. 2-5).
- 3) However, Timothy's report was of great encouragement to Paul and his company (v. 7).
- 4) Rather than being swayed by the schemes of Satan, the church of Thessalonica exhibited "*faith*" in God and "*charity*" toward God and one another, including Paul and his ministry team, whom the church desired to see (v. 6).
- 5) Even in the face of hardship, Paul and his cohort "*were comforted*" by the church's faith in Christ (v. 7).
- 6) The encouragement they received from Timothy's report is emphasized by Paul's figurative language in verse 8:
- 7) To Paul, the good news from Thessalonica of the church standing fast in the Lord was life-giving.
- 8) Once again, Paul returned to the theme of offering thanksgiving to God for the faithfulness of the Thessalonian church (v. 9; see 1:2-3; 2:13-14).
- 9) He offered thanksgiving to God because he and his companions experienced "*joy*" in light of the excellent report.
- 10) In the original language, the words "*joy*" and "*rejoice*" punctuate Paul's personal encouragement to the news in Thessalonica, even though he was experiencing hardship (3:9).
- 11) The joy they received and continued to experience led Paul and company to continue in intense prayer to God that they might be reunited with the Thessalonian church and supply what was "*lacking in [their] faith*" (v. 10).
- 12) The rest of the letter addressed the areas the Thessalonian church was lacking, which referred to what they lacked in their understanding of Biblical doctrine and how to live as followers of Jesus.

B. Prayer for Continued Faithfulness - 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

- 1) At the end of chapter 3, Paul penned a specific prayer directed to God on behalf of the Thessalonian disciples.
- 2) The prayer had two petitions:
 - a. First, he prayed he and his companions would be reunited with the Thessalonian church (v. 11).
 - i. This was partly in response to what he believed were areas of their faith that needed additional instruction (v. 10).
 - ii. He petitioned God the Father and the Lord Jesus to clear their way, given that Satan had hindered their return to that point (2:18).

- b. Second, Paul desired that the Lord would increase the disciples' love toward one another and to all people (3:12).
 - i. The manner of love Paul wished the church to "*increase and abound*" in was like that of Paul and his companions' love for the Thessalonian church (v. 12).
 - ii. The intended result of this second petition was that the Lord Jesus would "*stablish [their] hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father*" (v. 13) at Christ's second coming when He, "*with all His saints*" (v. 13), would be united to the people of God. Paul's prayer was that the disciples of Christ in Thessalonica would continue to walk in faithfulness before the Lord, specifically in the area of love toward others, even amid Satan's opposition (v. 12).
 - iii. In so doing, they would one day be able to stand faultless and holy before the Lord at His coming.
- 3) The theme of Jesus' return runs throughout both of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians.
- 4) Though the Bible was not originally penned with chapters and verses, it is interesting that in 1 Thessalonians, every chapter ends with a reference to Christ's return.
- 5) This was clearly a concern for Paul and the Christians in Thessalonica.

Call To Discipleship

We can be assured that God is always consistent, present, and faithful, no matter the circumstances or situations we may experience. This elicits confidence in God.

Ministry In Action

Encourage and pray for one another to remain faithful to God through both joyful and challenging times. Through faith in Jesus, we can come to the Father and find grace and mercy.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Lesson 9

PAUL'S THREE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

The Apostle Paul engaged in three major missionary journeys. His brief ministry in Thessalonica, cut short by persecution (Acts 17:1, 5, 10), was during his Second Missionary Journey.

Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1–14:26; AD 48-49) began from the church in Antioch in Syria. The Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul (Paul) to this evangelistic mission, and they were sent to it by the church in Antioch and the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-4).

Barnabas and Saul (Paul) went by ship to the island of Cyprus, the home country of Barnabas. They preached and ministered with success across the whole island (Acts 13:4-12), and there “Saul” began to be called “Paul” (v. 9). After this, they sailed north to Asia Minor and traveled there establishing churches.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36–18:21; AD 50-52) began at Antioch in Syria. Paul was accompanied by Silas, and joined by Timothy and Luke along the way. Paul and Silas encouraged established Christian congregations in Asia Minor and established new congregations in Macedonia and Greece. Paul ministered 18 months in Corinth (18:1, 11), and there wrote his two letters to the Thessalonians (AD 50-51) and his letter to the churches in Galatia (AD 52).

Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:22–20:38; AD 54-57) began at Antioch in Syria. There is no mention of any ministry colleague traveling with Paul. He traveled again across Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, strengthening the churches. Then, he came to Ephesus (19:1), and ministered there for three years (20:16-17, 31), with such success “*that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks*” (19:10). During this time at Ephesus, Paul wrote the letter we call First Corinthians (spring of AD 57).

Paul's traveling ministry was suspended for five years (late spring AD 58 to summer AD 63) while he, a Roman citizen, was held in the protective custody of the Roman government (Acts 23:26-30, 33-34; 24:23, 27; 28:16, 30-31).

THE PRIORITY OF PRAYER

1. What did Paul do “without ceasing,” and why (1 Thessalonians 2:13)?

2. What did Paul call the Thessalonians in verse 20, and why?

Could you make a similar statement about someone to whom you have ministered? Why or why not?

3. “If you want to do something great for God, then get ready to be tested greatly. You’ll be tested greatly so you can be trusted greatly.”—Louie Giglio

Have you seen this principle at work in your Christian experience? If so, how?

4. As seen in 3:5, how does Satan try to undermine Christian ministry?

5. What principles are found in 3:11-13 that can strengthen our prayers for ourselves and others?