

## A Study of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians

### Week Two

### 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4:8

#### Day One

3:1 So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. 2 We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, 3 so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.

v. 1 – Paul went from Berea to Athens, but then sent Timothy from Berea to go back to Thessalonica. Notice Paul didn't write, "The Lord directed us" or "The Spirit spoke to us." Instead he wrote, "We thought it best." There are some people who hear from the Lord about everything. What do I know? Maybe they do. There are some people, however, who over-spiritualize things, in my opinion. God gave us a brain and sometimes He expects us to use it! Paul used his judgment and sent Timothy back to Thessalonica. **Are you afraid to make decisions for fear you will miss the Lord?** Relax! Remember what Proverbs 16:3 states:

Roll your works upon the Lord [commit and trust them wholly to Him; *He will cause your thoughts to become agreeable to His will*, and] so shall your plans be established and succeed (Amplified Version, emphasis added).

Trust that He is even guiding your thoughts and then do what you think is best.

v. 2 – Paul had the highest confidence in Timothy, for he wrote to the Philippians:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon (Phil 2:19-24).

Paul sent Timothy because Timothy had proven himself through distinguished service. God never promotes people with potential; He promotes and uses people who are faithful. **Have you been faithful with the opportunities the Lord has given you?**

v. 3 – To be a Christian means that you will go through various trials. Trials aren't an indication that you've done something wrong, but that you are indeed a Christian! Don't let trials unsettle you. Keep your eyes on Jesus and not on your circumstances. Trials shape you into the person God wants you to be, so don't resist them. Rejoice in them!

## Day Two

4 In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. 5 For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless. 6 But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.

v. 4 – Oh yes, all who follow Jesus will encounter persecution. Someone, somewhere will be upset with you and do something to oppose you whenever you decide to follow the Lord without compromise. I am thinking of two verses that reinforce this truth:

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets (Luke 6:26).

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:12-14).

It seems that true believers will encounter persecution and “evil men” and false prophets will not be treated the same way. So one of the marks of a true believer and follower is persecution. **From whom do you experience persecution? Why? For doing right or acting strangely? For speaking truth or meddling in others’ affairs?**

v. 5 – Paul knew the tactics of his enemies and was concerned that the inevitable persecution had undermined their faith. He knew the nature of spiritual warfare and he also knew that if the Thessalonians had succumbed to the pressure and denied the Lord, their initial faith would have been rendered useless. So it must be possible to deny the Lord and lose salvation, although it is not as easy as some may imagine.

v. 6 – Timothy came just in time as a source of encouragement for Paul. I have found that to be true so often. Just when I needed it most, God will send the encouragement to let me know He is with me. Does the same happen for you? Do you receive the encouragement when it comes? I know that’s a strange question, but I have been so anxious at times that I could not receive the help that God sent. I have chosen to stay in my anxiety or perhaps I was just too weak to respond.

God may not always send what you think you need, but He will always send encouragement if you are open to receive it.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:5-6).

Not only must you be open to receive encouragement, but also to give it. It is said of Jesus:

The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary (Isaiah 50:4).

We are to be like Jesus, so we must learn to be encouragers, learn how to sustain the weary with a “good word.” **Are you an encourager? Do people like to see you coming or hide? Do you build people up?** It isn’t enough that you don’t tear anyone down—you must learn to build them up.

### Day Three

7 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. 8 For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. 9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

vs. 7&8 – Paul wasn’t encouraged because of a change in his own circumstances. He was encouraged because he heard that his flock was doing well. Paul, for all his shortcomings, was a very caring pastor, who put the peoples’ needs ahead of his own. I have to believe what he wrote about Timothy was also true about himself:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon (Philippians 2:19-24).

And of course, Paul and Timothy served others because they were following Jesus’ example and allowed the Spirit to shape them in the image of Jesus:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8).

**Is your attitude the same as that of Jesus, Paul and Timothy? Do you put the needs of others ahead of your own? Are you a servant leader, not just a servant or a leader?**

v. 9 – Paul rejoiced in the Lord for the good standing of the Thessalonian church. *Lord, I have so far to go before I can be as selfless as Paul. Help me to be the pastor and servant you want me to be. Help me to embody the principles of love and service found in your Word:*

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load (Galatians 6:2-5).

Whose burdens are you helping to carry in the Lord? With whom are you joined so that you can rejoice in their good fortune as if it were your own?

v. 10 – Paul was a man of prayer and he earnestly wished to return to Thessalonica. But there was only one Paul and so many opportunities. That is why he had to rely on Timothy, Titus, Luke and others to help him do the work. **Are you able to delegate? Do you realize that there is only so much you can do? Who is your team—at work or at church? And what are you praying where others are concerned? Are you praying for opportunities to build up the faith of others, supplying what they lack?**

The gospel truly requires a selfless attitude that can only be accomplished in the power of the Spirit who changes you to be like Jesus!

#### **Day Four**

11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. 12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

v. 11 – Paul knew how to pray! He didn't pray for God to send His angels—Paul asked that the Father and Jesus make a way for him to return to Thessalonica. If God clears the way for you to do something, it will get done! So it appears that Satan had hindered Paul from returning and he was asking God to do something about it.

Yet I can't help but think that God wanted Paul to be in other places, even though his pastor's heart wanted him to be with the Thessalonians. So my thinking is that God allowed the opposition and used it to position Paul to be where God wanted him to be. I have heard some say that the devil is God's devil—God still rules and reigns and uses the devil's schemes to still work out His plan. Do you agree or disagree with this? Can the devil do things “on his own” and oppose God or does God even rule the devil?

v. 12 – While each of these verses today begins with “may,” they read like prayers to me. **Do you agree?** So if these are prayers and if the Bible is the inspired word of God (there

*www.purposequest.com*

is no doubt that it is), then these prayers are inspired by the Holy Spirit. So these prayers would be good prayers for you and me to pray. **So stop right now, and pray this verse, inserting the names of family, friends and fellow believers in the prayer.** If you like this way of praying, I have a list of prayers from the Bible that you can download at [http://www.purposequest.com/bible\\_studies.htm](http://www.purposequest.com/bible_studies.htm). Use them in your prayer life.

v. 13 – Paul prayed that God would strengthen their hearts. I wonder what that means exactly? I’m not sure, but the result was that they were to be blameless and holy. And Paul mentioned the return of the Lord, a theme and topic with which the Thessalonians struggled to understand. Nothing much has changed in the Church, for the return of the Lord is still clouded in fairy tale, superstition and poor biblical exegesis. Paul addressed this issue later in his letter so I will wait to make my comments there until then.

### **Day Five**

4:1 Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

v. 1 – Paul urged the Thessalonians to pursue excellence by doing what they knew to do, but doing those things “more and more.” This speaks of growth and developing an increased capacity for love and good deeds. This entails knowing your purpose, setting goals and managing time, your most precious possession, with skill. How are you doing in those three key areas? Do you know your purpose—what you were created to do? Do you have goals? Are they clearly written out? Where is your time going? Do you know?

Pleasing God isn’t a collection of random acts, done spontaneously on a daily basis. It is hard but joyful and exhilarating work. It is work with purpose that produces things that will serve others.

Notice Paul’s gentleness as he led his flock. He asked them “in the Lord Jesus Christ.” He didn’t order them outright, but rather appealed to them as fellow disciples. The man with the most authority in the early church was always hesitant to use that authority incorrectly. He was always directing people, but directing them as God would want. He was clear to make sure that this wasn’t just his will, but the will of God, so that they would be following Jesus and not Paul. **Are there any leadership lessons there for you? What kind of leader are you? Someone once said that authority is like soap—the more you use it, the less you have. Are you about “washed up” as a leader, or do you lead as Jesus and Paul led?**

v. 2 – Paul once again laid out his instructions, careful to direct the people’s attention to Jesus and not just to Paul. I have begun to see Paul in a whole new light recently. I always saw him as a “fire and brimstone” preacher and apostle. But there was a gentle side to Paul that is seldom explored. I want Paul to mentor me. Even though he’s long gone, I want to study his life and learn how I can be a better leader of God’s people. **Will**

**you join me in this study? Will you allow Paul to mentor you as well? Will you pray that God would open your eyes and teach you the lessons that you need to learn from Paul's leadership style? I hope so.**

### **Day Six**

3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.

v. 3 – I have been studying Proverbs recently and I realized just how much of the first chapters talk about sexual purity and adultery. See for yourself by going to Proverbs 2:16-19; Proverbs 5; Proverbs 6:20-35; and Proverbs 7. Notice as you read, how often the phrase “my son” appears. It seems that sexual mores and rules are to be imparted in a family setting and not one provided by schools, government or social agencies.

**In your family, how often do you talk about sex?** If the wise king Solomon saw fit to devote that much space to “sex talk” in his Proverbs wisdom literature, then we would do well to follow his wisdom and do the same.

Yet we must be realistic concerning this present age. The world is saturated with sex through television, dvd's and the Internet. It is almost impossible not to encounter something every day. So the Church must be prepared that new converts will most probably have a sexual history, much as the Corinthian church did. This will mean that the Church must be more open to talking about God's view of sex and much more patient with those who are being delivered from a free sexual lifestyle.

It is my opinion that every local church should have some ministry to those who are addicted to sex or pornography, or at least know where people can get help. That means that the Church must provide a more open environment where those who have problems can come forward—not before the whole church, but appointed or designated counselors who are equipped and anointed to help them. I think acceptance without judgment should be the rule for those who are working with people who have sexual problems or sins. **Do you agree or disagree?**

vs. 4&5 – I think this has to include the discussion and outreach to homosexuals, both male and female. Modern culture portrays this lifestyle as normal or at least acceptable. We must teach people what God's will is for their body where sex is concerned and then help them walk out those truths. There is no easy way to do this. We must utilize the pulpit, small groups, counselors, support groups and writers to do a much better job than we have done to help those with sexual sins.

And we must realize that pastors and leaders aren't exempt from the onslaught. We must overcome our tendency to be shocked when anyone, even leaders, becomes entrapped by

sexual sin. If they repent and want help, then we should provide it for them without judgment. Too many good men have been forced to resign or flee because they made a mistake. Now, some men have broken the law with minors and members of the flock. They must suffer the consequences of their sins legally and if they refuse to repent, be shunned and removed from the church body. **But I wonder how many could have been helped before it got to that if the Church was more open to helping those with sexual problems, especially leaders.**

v. 6a – When sexual problems involve members of the church being involved with one another, then that presents another set of problems. This requires a special type of counseling that the church should provide for the members, even if the church has to fund such counseling. The goal here would be restoration and forgiveness. How this would occur would be different for each situation and I am not saying that those wronged or guilty can ever resume a normal life in the church where they sinned. But I do believe they can resume a normal life somewhere if the church does its job and God provides the grace. **Is this too idealistic? Do you agree or disagree?**

### **Day Seven**

The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. <sup>7</sup> For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. <sup>8</sup> Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

v. 6b – The first part of verse six instructed that no one should defraud or take advantage of a fellow believer in this matter. It is my opinion that Paul was referring to sexual sin that involved members of the body of Christ, marking this as particularly offensive to God. He noted that God would punish men for all such sins. I am not saying that all sexual sin isn't offensive to God, but when it involves members of the covenant community with one another, it seems to take on an even more serious nature. That is my opinion, and I have not found a lot of good commentary on this verse. So we will have to produce our own commentary.

v. 7 – Remember that Paul was writing to a pagan society that had few if any sexual scruples. Many sexual sins were practiced in the context of idolatry and homosexuality and prostitution were commonplace. Paul had to relate to a culture so different from what he knew in Israel and was having to provide practical instruction to a people who had no religious or biblical background. This endears Paul to me all the more. This man stepped out of his “comfort zone” for God to evangelize and teach a people whom he had been taught to avoid. Pharisees would have considered Gentiles unclean and offensive.

But Paul was willing to do anything for God and that included making the Gentiles into the people of God. **What are you willing to do for God? I listen to some of our hymns and songs and wonder if we realize what we are singing?** “All to Jesus, I surrender, all to Him I freely give;” “I surrender all.” “Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.” “Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.”

Wow! Those are “heavy” commitments to make, even if there are musical notes attached to them. **Have you sung those lyrics or some like them? Then are you prepared to follow up on your musical prayers and vows? Is there something on your heart that you think God may want you to do?** Then I urge you to take steps to do it, even if it takes you out of your comfort zone. Be like Paul and do something great for God. Don’t let all that music go to waste!