



1 Thessalonians - Chapter Two

II. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3:13 - Thanksgiving and Encouragement (continues)

Summary of Chapter Two

In this chapter Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the manner of his teaching among them (vv.1-6), and then of the manner of his conversation among them (vv.7-12). Afterwards of the success of his ministry, with the effects both on himself and on them (vv.13-16), and then apologises for his continuing absence from them (vv.17-20).

II.b 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 - Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

Paul expands upon what he had said in summary form in 1:5, that the missionaries in Thessalonica displayed all the traits of authentic ministers of the Gospel. Some suggest that Paul is giving a model for imitation, and this is probably part of what Paul is emphasising here. However, the appeals to witnesses and the references to the Thessalonians' knowledge suggest that Paul in vv.1-12 is primarily defending the missionaries' integrity with respect to the mission, just as in 2:17-3:10 he will offer a defence of his subsequent absence from Thessalonica.

Paul may be responding to real accusations, or merely anticipating concerns in the wake of the Thessalonians' crisis regarding the Day of the Lord. Paul distinguishes the missionaries from charlatans, perhaps especially Cynic philosophers and/or Jewish false prophets.

Paul continues to underscore his certainty regarding the Thessalonians' election, as commented on in 1:4. They put their trust in the Word of God (v.13), and they suffered persecution just as the mother churches in Judæa had (v.14). Paul then denounces apostate Jews who had opposed the prophets and Jesus, and who had more recently driven Paul out of Thessalonica (vv.15-16).

¹ You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, ² but though we had already suffered and been shamefully maltreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

In vain, Greek *kenos*, indicates that Paul does not consider his work among them to have been empty of results, or empty of substance and character.

Shamefully maltreated at Philippi. Paul and Silas had been publically flogged and imprisoned in Philippi for freeing a slave girl from the possession of an evil spirit as recorded in Acts 16:19-39. Paul also alludes to this occasion in his letter to Philippi: <<***For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well – since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have***>> (Philippians 1:29-30).

We had courage in our God. Despite experiencing fierce persecution in Philippi, Paul did not shrink from proclaiming the Gospel in Thessalonica, even when it entailed further opposition, threats and suffering.

In spite of great opposition actually refers to a high degree of persecution that had caused suffering and could have led to death.

³ For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts.

1 Thessalonians 2:3-4

Our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery. Paul uses the first person plural to show that he is referring to Silas and Timothy as well as himself. He has just reminded them that they had suffered a great deal for the sake of the Gospel in Philippi and yet were undaunted as they continued their work despite facing further hostile opposition. Paul would have been comparing himself to the many teachers of wisdom and philosophy who travelled around speaking to the crowds with the ulterior motive of either receiving financial reward or establishing their own reputation and power base. Paul had to refute similar charges made against him by his opponents in Corinth: <<***For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence***>> (2 Corinthians 2:17), and: <<***We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practise cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God***>> (2 Corinthians 4:2). Paul has no such ulterior motives but is so convicted by his mission that he will accept any punishment or hardship in doing so with no personal gain whatsoever.

Paul states his thesis in general terms before demonstrating it with specific regard to the Thessalonian mission in vv.5-12. Negatively, Paul insists that the missionaries were not characterised by a faulty message, impure motives, or dubious methods (v.3). Positively, he states that they preached the Gospel as those approved by God, as confirmed by: <<***whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which***>>

he entrusted to me>> (1 Timothy 1:10b-11), and as those committed to speaking in order not to please their human audience but to please God (v.4). He explains his position forcefully to the church in Galatia: <<*Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ*>> (Galatians 1:10). Jesus had warned such people: <<*How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?*>> (John 5:44).

Who tests our hearts. Not only did God sanction the missionaries to proclaim his Gospel; he continues to approve of their inner motives and integrity, as noted in his revelation to John: <<*And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve*>> (Revelation 2:23b).

Introduction to 1 Thessalonians 2:5-9

Negatively, Paul asserts that he and his fellow missionaries had not spoken as charlatans or false prophets in order to gratify their own vanity, line their own pockets, or gain even legitimate honour (vv.5-6). Positively, he stresses the missionaries' sincerity and selfless and profound devotion toward the Thessalonian believers, extending beyond the call of duty (vv.7-9).

⁵ As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; ⁶ nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, ⁷ though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. ⁸ So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

1 Thessalonians 2:5-8

It can never be underestimated what it meant for Paul to write God is our witness. Both as a Pharisaic Jew and now as a Christian Paul would never take such an oath lightly. If he were to do so then he would be insulting the very God whom he had served so passionately all his life. It was the law and therefore embedded in his psyche: <<*You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name*>> (Exodus 20:7); it is emphasised in the teaching of Jesus: <<*Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord." But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be "Yes, Yes" or "No, No"; anything more than this comes from the evil one*>> (Matthew 5:33-37).

Words of flattery. If the missionaries had employed flattery, there might have been legitimate doubt as to whether their message was genuine and trustworthy.

A pretext for greed. Paul did not minister for financial gain; this is made abundantly clear by his insistence on working at a trade rather than depending on his converts for his keep: <<*For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you*>> (2 Thessalonians 3:7-8). God is their witness and only God can attest to the inner motives of a human heart.

Nor did we seek praise. Paul's ministry in Thessalonica was not a quest for personal glory or fame, especially not from a human source, i.e. praise from mortals, which was an accusation levelled against the religious leaders in Jerusalem: <<*Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God*>> (John 12:42-43).

We might have made demands as apostles of Christ. As apostles, they had unique authority to request support, as Paul did to the Roman church: <<*For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while*>> (Romans 15:24b), something confirmed in other passages, especially 1 Corinthians 9:3-14.

We were gentle among you. Paul highlights the fact that he and his fellow missionaries did not exploit their rights and privileges but acted in an unassuming manner toward the converts.

Like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. Paul and his fellow missionaries were without guile, but were loving and selfless in their devotion to the converts.

So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves. The Christian life is about relationship with God and with each other; sharing in life and in death: <<*We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another*>> (1 John 3:16).

Having spoken of the true and living God in contrast to idols (1:9), it is clear that Paul found himself living in the presence of that God, knowing that his own heart was under scrutiny as he went about his appointed work. God had entrusted him with the Gospel, like a monarch entrusting to a messenger an announcement for subjects far away. His responsibility was to deliver that message completely and accurately, without regard for his own place in the proceedings, or to any reward or honour that might or might not come his way. Paul was not going to allow this status as a herald of the King to puff up his own self-importance.

⁹ You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:9

Paul's love was shown by the fact that he had undertaken long hours of manual labour in order to avoid burdening the Thessalonians financially. Paul probably worked as a tentmaker, using the pay from this to fund his ministry and personal living costs: <<*After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together – by trade they were tentmakers*>> (Acts 18:1-3), something he also did in Ephesus: <<*You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions*>> (Acts 20:34), and: <<*To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands*>> (1 Corinthians 4:11-12a).

Paul's situation was tricky. Had he accepted financial support from the churches he was currently establishing then he could be accused of spreading the Gospel for personal gain. When he refused such payment he was accused of not really belonging to the community of faith, as reflected throughout his letters to Corinth. Yet Paul does make it clear that he and others like him are entitled to financial support from the church groups they serve: <<*Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher*>> (Galatians 6:6), and: <<*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain', and, 'The labourer deserves to be paid'*>> (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

We worked night and day is an indication of the commitment that Paul was prepared to make for the church and is a term he used frequently, including: <<*Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith*>> (1 Thessalonians 3:10), <<*I am grateful to God – whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did – when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day*>> (2 Timothy 1:3); and Luke used it to describe the commitment of the prophetess Anna: <<*She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day*>> (Luke 2:37b).

¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was towards you believers. ¹¹ As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, ¹² urging and encouraging you and pleading that you should lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 2:10-12

You are witnesses, and God also adds true authenticity to Paul's words: <<*For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers*>> (Romans 1:9), and declares the trustworthiness of his letters in today's world as well.

Paul forcefully insists that the missionaries had been pure, upright, and blameless in everything they did while among the new converts. Note the strong familial language here and in v.7 and v.17. Paul stresses again that the manner and content of the missionaries' proclamation demonstrated their authenticity and authority.

Paul often referred to the church as his children: <<*I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children*>> (1 Corinthians 4:14), <<*My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you*>> (Galatians 4:19), <<*To Timothy, my loyal child in the faith*>> (1 Timothy 1:2a), and: <<*I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment*>> (Philemon 10); as did John: <<*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*>> (1 John 2:1), <<*The children of your elect sister send you their greetings*>> (2 John 13), and: <<*I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth*>> (3 John 4).

You should lead a life worthy of God. Mankind was made in God's own image: <<*So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*>> (Genesis 1:27), therefore Christian behaviour is not just a matter of keeping a few rules made by a heavenly bureaucrat, as might seem to be the case with pagan gods, but is a matter of reflecting God's glory in every facet of human life.

His own kingdom and glory. At Jesus' Second Coming, Christians will enjoy the full blessings of the Kingdom and will participate in God's glory.

Those in places like Thessalonica would have been used to itinerant teachers and philosophers, and religious groups like the Jews. However, none of them would have been like this man Paul and his team, who were prepared to work so hard physically so as to meet their own material needs while continuing to take every opportunity to share the Gospel message. They were truly living what they were calling others to do and were therefore worthy of imitation.

¹³ We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

Not as a human word but God's word. Paul clearly claims an absolute divine authority for his words as an apostle, and contrasts his words with ordinary human

words. His apostolic teaching really is God's word, and should be received as if spoken by God himself.

If it had been a merely human message, one might expect that when the hearers began to be persecuted for accepting it they would turn back and give up. But they had not. The word had produced in them the same kind of steadfastness in them as it had in the very first disciples, the communities of Jesus' followers in Judæa, as Paul will go on to show.

Which is also at work in you. The Word of God is still active in the Thessalonian community, which is a primary purpose in its dissemination: <<*For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*>> (1 Corinthians 1:18), and: <<*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*>> (Hebrews 4:12).

¹⁴ For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judæa, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone ¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last.

1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judæa. Genuine offspring bear the traits of their parents. The Judæan churches were the first, indisputably authentic churches, and the mother churches of all those planted by Paul. They established a standard by which all other churches might measure themselves. Like them, the Thessalonian Christians suffered persecution for Jesus.

You suffered the same things from your own compatriots. The Thessalonians' Gentile countrymen were stirred up against them by Jewish opponents of the Gospel, as recorded in Acts 17:5-10.

Paul so loved his fellow Jews that he would almost be willing to be eternally damned if it would mean that they would come to faith: <<*I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh*>> (Romans 9:1-3), but here he points out that in their hardheartedness they consistently reject God's Word; refer to Matthew 23:29-35.

Who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets. Although it was the Roman authorities who had ordered the crucifixion of Jesus, it was the Jews that had handed him over and therefore their responsibility that he had died: <<*He asked*

them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him>> (Luke 24:19-20), <<Pilate replied, ‘I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?’>> (John 18:35), and: <<Jesus answered him, ‘You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin’>> (John 19:11). This was the accusation of Stephen against the Sanhedrin shortly before being martyred by them: <<Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers>> (Acts 7:52).

Drove us out. Paul was forced to flee the area because the acts of a mob had led the local authorities to impose a penalty on the church if the evangelists were found to be the cause of any further riots, again as noted in Acts 17:5-10. Paul sees what happened to the missionaries in Thessalonica as the latest in a long series of examples of Jewish hostility to the Gospel of Christ.

Oppose everyone. It is in all humanity’s interest to hear the Gospel that offers salvation; to stand in the way of the Gospel is therefore to oppose all of mankind.

By hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. The Jewish communities had tried to stop Paul from taking the Word of God to the local Gentile communities from the outset of his missionary journeys. For example, his experience in Pisidian Antioch: *<<When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers. Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region>> (Acts 13:48-50).*

Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins indicates that God may see sin as cumulative as well as deserving of punishment for each individual sinful act, which Jesus indicates may even be generational: *<<Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors>> (Matthew 23:32).*

God’s wrath has overtaken them at last. It is possible that Paul had in mind here:

1. The Judæan famine in AD44-47.
2. The riot and massacre in Jerusalem in AD48-49.
3. Or the expulsion of Jews from Rome in AD49.

However, each seems too localised and insignificant to warrant such a dramatic description here. Alternatively, a future event may be in view, spoken of here in the Greek aorist tense as having come because it is so certain, as also seen in: *<<So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours>> (Mark 11:24), <<When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him’>> (John 13:31), <<And those whom he predestined he also called; and those*

whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified>> (Romans 8:30), or because it has already begun to be fulfilled.

God's anger is never capricious or malevolent; when humans reject him, and believe in ways that undermine his wise and generous designs for them and the world, he does not instantly punish but allows time for repentance. If this does not happen, wickedness builds up and sin accumulates until the point is reached where God must say 'enough' and bring things to an end, as he did with the Canaanites, as seen in: <<*And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete*>> (Genesis 15:16), which also explains the need for the long stay in Egyptian captivity for the Hebrew nation. Paul sees the people of Judæa as being in the same position, courting disaster by continuing to oppose the Gospel of God's Son, the world's only true King.

In AD70, a few years after Paul's own death, God's wrath would be poured out on the Jews who opposed the Gospel when he allowed the Romans to destroy the Jerusalem temple, dispersing the Jews who had opposed Rome. It led to the end of the Levitical priesthood and the whole sacrificial system that had sustained them from the time of Moses until the coming of their Messiah. Following Jesus' death there was no need for such ordinances. This was a verdict alluded to by the Jewish historian Josephus although he never openly acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah.

Verses 13-16 form a solemn and serious passage of Scripture, which speaks volumes to those even today who are being persecuted for their faith in Jesus. This does not mean that something has gone badly wrong with God's plan of salvation; merely that they are sharing in the sufferings of Christ and, like him, will be vindicated in God's good time.

II.c 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5 - Paul's Desire to Visit the Thessalonians Again

Just as vv.1-12 illustrates a defence of the missionaries during the mission in Thessalonica, this section is a defence of the missionaries' absence. Thus Paul expresses his concern that the missionaries' premature departure from Thessalonica, the length of their absence, and his own failure to return, should not be misinterpreted as evidence of a lack of pastoral concern.

What this passage will show is that Paul was not just a cerebral theologian but was a passionate man who deeply loved the church and had genuine desire to be with the people he cared so much about.

¹⁷ As for us, brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you – in person, not in heart – we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face.

1 Thessalonians 2:17

For a short time. The missionaries left Thessalonica against their will in the face of persecution, but Timothy's recent visit ended the brief absence.

We were made orphans, Greek *aporphanizō*, i.e. torn away, suggests deep distress at the involuntary separation.

Separated from you - in person, not in heart. Physical absence did not reflect a lack of concern or involvement in spirit: <<*For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgement*>> (1 Corinthians 5:3), and: <<*For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ*>> (Colossians 2:5).

We longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. Contrary to what the Thessalonians might think, the missionaries had repeatedly tried to get back to Thessalonica.

¹⁸ For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again – but Satan blocked our way.

1 Thessalonians 2:18

I, Paul. This reveals that Paul has the authority of an apostle in this letter and that he feels the need to defend himself with respect to the period of absence. This is one of only six occasions where Paul refers to himself by name in the body of a letter. The others are 2 Corinthians 10:1, Galatians 5:2, Ephesians 3:1, Colossians 1:23 and Philemon 9. On each occasion it inevitably carries special significance.

Satan blocked our way. Paul does not mention Satan very often in his letters but when he does he seems to be aware that behind at least some of the ordinary frustrations and thwarted plans that are common to the human experience there may be discerned a darker and more malevolent force at work. Paul presumably means that the opposition he faced and the death threats he had received as he travelled ever further south away from Thessalonica made it quite impossible for him to return there at the present time. In particular, they thwarted his deep purpose, to care for this new church, to teach them the way of holiness, and to bring them the comfort that a fuller understanding of the Gospel would afford.

¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ Yes, you are our glory and joy!

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

Presenting his converts to Jesus at the Second Coming is an integral part of Paul's Christian hope and joy. Paul used as similar term in reference to the nearby church in Philippi: <<*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved*>> (Philippians 4:1).

Crowns or wreaths were given to winning athletes: <<*And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules*>> (2 Timothy 2:5), and would be given to those who persevere to the end in their faith: <<*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him*>> (James 1:12), and: <<*From now on there is reserved for me the*

crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing>> (2 Timothy 4:8). It was known that believers were God's crown: <<You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God>> (Isaiah 62:3), and that they will receive crowns of their own when he returns: <<And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away>> (1 Peter 5:4).