Introduction

People go to church for a lot of different reasons. People listen to sermons with a lot of different motives. Sometimes we listen but we are not hearing with either our mind or our heart. We may come to Jesus Christ as sinners alone; saved alone; but we are called to come together in local assemblies for the purpose of worship and prayer and mutual edification. We are saved alone; but we were never meant to stay alone.

In this short epistle Paul recounts how the church was born (chapter one) and how the church was nurtured (chapter two) and how the church’s foundation was laid (chapter three). Later Paul will exhort the church to walk in holiness and harmony and honesty and hope and helpfulness (chapter 4). We will learn more about what it means to be a Christian in the local assembly.

In this passage of Scripture Paul will point to God’s Word in us (v.13) and God’s people around us (vv.14-16); and God’s glory before us (vv.17-20). We have a clue concerning the condition of the Thessalonian believer’s hearts by the use of key words; affliction (1 Thes. 1:6; 3:3); which means pressure from circumstance; suffered (1 Thes.2:14); the same word used to describe the sufferings of Jesus Christ; persecuted (1 Thes. 2:15) which means “driven and rejected”; contrary (1 Thes. 2:15); used of stormy winds that blow and hinder progress; and hindered (1 Thes. 2:18); which pictures a road so badly damaged that travel is impossible (From Warren Wiersbe’s TBEC Vol. 2; p. 167). In spite of affliction, suffering, persecution, contrary circumstances and rough roads, the believers were filled with joy of the Holy Spirit (1 Thes. 1:6) and hope (1 Thes. 2:20).

The Model Church Prefers The Word Of God (v.13)

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NKJV) For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

What reason is Paul talking about? In the beginning of the chapter Paul has been defending himself against the opposition, persecution and accusations being made against him and the ministry team. Their integrity and conduct were called into question. Now Paul’s attention turns to the issue of thanksgiving and praise for the people who received the word of God. The Thessalonian believers welcomed the message of Jesus “not as the word of men but as it is in truth, the word of God”. The word of God “effectively works in you who believe”. The Thessalonian believers received the word of God through the faithful preaching and teaching of men. The word received means accepted from one another; it is a word which means “the hearing of the ear”; while the word welcomed means hearing with the heart. The believers not only heard the Word--they took it inside themselves; it became a part of their core being. They received the Word of God so that it could operate in their lives. Sometimes for us, the space between our hearing mind and believing hearts is a long way to travel. We hear the truth, but do we always welcome the truth?
Jesus warned people about hearing with a right mind and a right heart. Over and over again Jesus said; “He who has ears to hear; let him hear” (Matt. 13:9). Jesus gave another warning in Mark 4:24; “Take heed what you hear”.

Faithful people--preached and taught; the way God typically advances the gospel is through faithful men and women sharing the word of God with unbelievers. The gospel message was “heard from us” but clearly it was believed as coming from God Himself. Paul uses the word “truth” and the “word of God”; “effectively works in you who believe.”

Do you believe the Bible? Do you believe the Bible is telling you the truth about yourself? Some people would rather judge the Bible than allow the Bible to judge them. Some people would rather “read” the Bible but refuse to allow the Bible to “read” them. Is it wrong to doubt or question or criticize the Bible? Clearly for the person who places himself or herself above the Bible’s authority and inspiration do so all the time!

The people in the young church at Thessaloniki had a right appreciation of the Word of God and a right attitude towards the Word of God. The Bible claims to be the Word of God (see 2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible is not merely a book; but rather it is The Book; because it contains a divine message from an Almighty author; the Bible is called “the scripture” (Mark 12:10; Luke 4:21; 2 Peter 1:20; and The Scriptures Matthew 22:29; the term means holy writings.

2 Timothy 3:16 (NKJV) All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

Of all the names given to the Scripture “the Word of God” is perhaps the most significant, impressive and complete. It is sufficient to justify the faith of the weakest saint; it is the source of wisdom and love and hope. The Bible is divine in its origin, composition, preservation, content, character and cost.

The church came into existence because of the preaching of the word of God and believing its message; the gospel message. The same word that brought salvation could also enable the Thessalonian believers to live lives of joy for Jesus and endure suffering. Show me a believer’s bible and I can tell you a lot about that believer. It may sound cliche; but when a believer’s bible is falling apart; you can rest assured he or she is not falling apart.

How you treat your Bible becomes a pretty good indicator of how you will treat your Lord. Jesus is the living Word; and in reality both are bread; both are light; both are truth; both were conceived by the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit overshadowed a young virgin; and the Holy Spirit moved on men of God. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God forever; and the Word of God will live forever.

The believers appreciated the Word of God; appropriated the Word of God and applied the Word of God.
Marks Of A Model Church
1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

The believers obeyed the Word of God and allowed the Word of God to go to work in their lives. Appreciate the Bible—appropriate the Bible—but by all means apply the Word of God to your lives. We must both hear and do the Word of God. Contained within the Word of God is the germ or the kernel to accomplish the Word of God.

When you are faced with affliction (pressure from circumstances); suffering; persecution; when the road in front of you seems hopelessly blocked; when your spiritual travel seems horribly restricted; it will be the Word of God in you that will sustain you.

If we do not believe the Word of God all that is left to believe is the word of men. What words do they give you? Why the latest self-help; self-development, self-image; or perhaps noble words of justice, equality and commitment. But commitment to what? Everything about man ends with death. What can man’s words do to help ease the pain and pang of a guilty conscience?

The Model Church Imitates Other Healthy Churches (v.14

1 Thessalonians 2:14 (NKJV) For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans,

In what way did they become “imitators of the churches of God”? The test of their new found faith was dramatic and immediate. Right from the start the church experienced persecution and suffering. When you received Christ did you experience opposition from some family and friends? How we respond to this opposition becomes a true test of the reality of our faith. Paul reminds the new believers their circumstances are neither novel or isolated or new. The religious leaders sought to exterminate the churches in Judea who were in Christ Jesus through relentless opposition and persecution. All the while those who reject the gospel of grace embrace the certainty of God’s judgment for sin. We as sinners have been saved to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25); but those sinners who reject Christ and grace will experience wrath to the uttermost (1 Thess. 2:16).

The Model Church Avoids The Guilt Of Not Pleasing God (vv.15-16)

1 Thessalonians 2:15 (NKJV) who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men,

The churches in Judea and the Galilee experienced enormous pressure and persecution from there own relatives. Is Paul some religious bigot? Is Paul exercising hate speech? I don’t think so! Saul was a Jew and a persecutor of the Church before coming to Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul loved his fellow Jews and sought to provide for them (Acts 24:17; Rom. 9:1-5).
Why did the religious leaders kill Jesus and their own prophets? They were simply repeating the sins of their ancestors. The world has always consisted of people who embrace man made religions or the revelation of God. **People who oppose the Lord Jesus Christ and persecute His people are not pleasing to God.** People who live in the fantasy that they can hate God’s Son and still be pleasing to God are self-deceived. The Jews were unwilling to abandon their man-made traditions and religions and embrace the Lord Jesus Christ. They were contrary to all men. They resisted and hated the gospel; they rejected the messenger and the message. The Jews bitterly hated and completely despised the Messianic followers of Jesus. Persecution began with the prophets, continued with the Lord Jesus Christ and his disciples; Paul endured it; the churches in Judea suffered it. **But beyond the persecution lay the hope of the second coming of Jesus Christ! The mission of Christ would survive and not only survive but thrive!**

1 Thessalonians 2:16 (NKJV) *forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.*

How far were the enemies of the gospel willing to take the persecution and opposition? The word “forbidding” is the Greek verb *kolyo* and is translated “forbid” 17 times in the Greek New Testament; and “hinder” twice and in Romans 1:13 “let”; which in our modern language means “allow” but in Old English meant “don’t allow” or prohibit. The word comes from a root word that meant to “lopped” or “clipped” or “shaved”. The word literally means to “cut off” or “cut short” and therefore to hinder to forbid or prevent. In the nuance of language “hinder” might be a little more accurate and because the construction is in the present participle we might be more accurate in translating the passage “trying to keep us from speaking”.

Opposition and persecution often comes in direct proportion to faithful preaching of the message of eternal life. Paul preached Jesus Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins. The world can stand a moral message. The world can even stand people who have their own “spirituality”. But the world will oppose a Jesus Christ who is crucified for sins; when we take our stand with Jesus and for Jesus we must expect opposition from the unbelievers.

The Bible teaches that all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. How are you doing? What happens when you experience a set back? How do you deal with suffering? Do you become self-absorbed and self-centered? Do you act like you are the only person in the lion’s den or the fiery furnace? We all experience sickness and pain and bereavement. But I am talking about a special kind of suffering; the suffering that comes because of your testimony and love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe your family has rejected you. Perhaps you have been passed over for promotion. Christians face great trial and persecution all over the world. The model church either stands in support of the Lord Jesus Christ or in opposition to Christ. A person either stands in support of the Lord Jesus Christ or in opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ.

**The Model Church Embraces A Strong Apostolic Fellowship (vv.17-18)**

Marks Of A Model Church

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20
1 Thessalonians 2:17 (NKJV) But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.

In what way were Paul and Silas taken away from the believers? The word is aporphanizo and is a compound word; “apho” means “away from” and orphanos meaning “fatherless” or bereave of a parent; Paul uses the expression figuratively to express his feelings for them as a father separated from his children. “In Presence” prosopo (dative prosopon) “face”. We have an expression “face-time”. We might render this “in person” (like NIV).

Paul “endeavored” or hastened or hurried; the word means to be zealous to make every effort. We were all the more eager with great desire to see your face (NASB). When you love someone; and they are going through great trial and great tribulation; you want to drop everything and get to them as quickly as possible. **Love believes they need us; and our comfort and our help. Paul desperately wanted to return; but he could not return.**

1 Thessalonians 2:18 (NKJV) Therefore we wanted to come to you even I, Paul, time and again but Satan hindered us.

Paul’s strong desire was to come to them; “time and again” is “once-twice”--it means repeatedly; we might say “on more than one occasion”.

What is the difference between the Holy Spirit forbidding and Satan hindering? Modus operandi. Paul believed in a literal Satan. A supernatural being who opposed the work of God. Paul describes Satan as the tempter who tempts men (1 Thes. 3:5); the evil one (2 Thes. 3:3); and the god of this world (2 Cor.4:4); and the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2).

Paul uses a different word for “hindering” than in verse 16. Here the word is enkopto which means “to cut into, to impede one’s course by cutting off his way”. The idea is that Satan “broke up the road”; making the road impassable. “Satan had broken up the road before him and Paul could not get through to them, even though he longed to see them and to be a further help to them” (Walvoord; John p.36; The Thessalonian Epistles).

Have you ever shopped and circled a parking lot only to have someone cut in at just the last moment and take your space? For Paul returning meant death. It isn’t always wrong to die! But for Paul it was not God’s will and God’s timing that he should die at just that point in his ministry.

**The Model Church Prepares Saints For Eternity (vv.19-20)**

1 Thessalonians 2:19 (NKJV) For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?
Marks Of A Model Church
1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

All is not lost. Paul cries out and asks the question; “For what is our hope” or “what does the future hold for us?” Do we have real hope? Paul had a choice. Give in to remorse or regret; or look forward in Christ Jesus and rejoice!

If our hope is not in the Lord Jesus Christ we have no legitimate grounds for hope. The word crown is the Greek noun *stephanos*. The full definition of that word is “that which surrounds or encompasses (as a wall, a crowd:); a garland; for distinguished service. The reward for victors in the games.

When it is used with “rejoicing” (*kauchesis*) the act of glorying and here “crown of which we can boast”.

1 Thessalonians 2:20 (NKJV) *For you are our glory and joy.*

Paul is not content to walk into heaven’s gate alone. The model church and its members are willing to be used by God. Some of the people were perhaps already beginning to become a trial and a burden to Paul. But Paul saw them in heaven with him. We have joy in heaven because you are there. There seems to be a warning; a loss of joy if we walk into heaven empty handed or empty hearted. Later Paul will write in the little epistle to Philemon 1:6; “I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ”.

Paul knows these precious men and women “are our glory and joy”. The men and women have heard the gospel; received Christ and are a part of God’s forever family. Have you ever considered how God wants to use you and use your testimony of a transformed life to lead others to Christ? Has Paul’s prayer been answered in your life--are active in sharing your faith? Have you ever lead a single person to the Lord? I believe a crown of rejoicing awaits the person who will be able to present souls to the Lord Jesus Christ on that day! Won’t you ask God to help use you to point people to Jesus and God’s kingdom?

Conclusion

You can imagine the people reading Paul’s letter were greatly encouraged. The new believers were going through a time of intense persecution, painful trial, great suffering; and perhaps some were tempted to throw in the towel; to just give up. **Has doubt or discouragement ever rubbed you raw?** “Don’t give up. Lay hold of the spiritual resources you have in Jesus Christ. You have the Word of God in you; the people of God around you, and the glory of God before you. There is no need to give up.” (Warren Wiersbe; TBEC Vol. 2; pp.170-171). Allow truth to take the journey from head to heart. Welcome the truth. Walk in contentment; a happiness in the middle of heaviness can be cultivated by affirming, encouraging and edifying God’s people.