

80 – 1 Thess. 2 – God tests...the Adversary tries

We learned 2 important lessons in Paul's 1st chapter of his letter to the ecclesia in Thessalonica:

1. The Thessalonians were known throughout Christendom, according to Paul, because of their "*work of faith, toil of love and endurance of expectation.*" He held these 3 characteristics (faith, love, and expectation), and the actions they require and also produce (work, toil, and endurance). For those Christians who think believing in Jesus Christ is easy, and for those non-believers who may think believing in Jesus is somehow a weak excuse, they would do well to know a little about the Thessalonians who displayed these characteristics and persevered in the face of furious persecution.
2. Paul introduced Christ as "*our Rescuer out of the coming indignation.*" We spent a good part of our study last time looking into what Paul meant by "*the coming indignation*" and I pray you took some time this past week to fact check and study for yourself the probable significance of what that phrase – more importantly the event to which it refers – means to us today, as members of the body of Christ.

Concordant Commentary:

The secret of Paul's Thessalonian evangelism is twofold. He did not seek to turn them from their idols. That was incidental. He turned them *to God*. God and His grace provide the impelling power. In doing this they must needs turn their back on the idols they had worshiped. But more than this, he put before them a vital expectation. It was not a dead Christ he proclaimed to them. Nor did he stop with the resurrection. He engaged their hearts with the ascended Son of God, Whom they might expect to leave His place in heaven in order to receive them to Himself.

1 Thess. 2

1 For you yourselves are aware, brethren, that our entrance to you has not come to be for naught,

2 but, though suffering before and being outraged [*treated shamefully, insolently*] in Philippi, according as you are aware, we are bold in our God to speak the evangel of God to you with a vast struggle.

Paul says here, "*You know that our coming to you was not a wasted effort; it's a good thing too, because we came after suffering being treated shamefully in Philippi. We were bold when we spoke God's tidings to you boldly, but we also did so with great, strong, intense, large agony.*" Why agony?

3 For our entreaty is not out of deception, nor yet out of uncleanness [*Paul is speaking*

here in a moral sense], nor yet with guile [fraud of disposition or speech]

4 but, according as we have been tested by God

“Our hands and hearts are totally clean here. We’re here for your gain, not ours; and God knows it, because he has “examined, proved, scrutinized [us] (to see whether [we’re]...genuine or not), [like he would] metal. More than that, He recognizes as genuine *after* examination, to approve [us], [and] deem [us] worthy.”

to be entrusted with the evangel, **thus** are we speaking, not as pleasing men, but God, Who is testing our hearts.

The result of testing—scrutinizing, examining, and proving—is being entrusted (entrusted comes from the same Greek word as “Believed”). If God believes **you**, you’re worthy of **His** trust! Awesome! And Paul says here, *“That’s how we’re speaking...we could care less what men think; we care only what God thinks, because he continues to examine, scrutinize, and prove our hearts like He would metal, to see whether they continue to be genuine and we continue to be worthy of His approval and trust.”*

This testing process was ongoing, according to Paul. Here’s how the CLNT-KC defines “**test**” – “*form a careful opinion by subjecting the senses or mind to impressions.*” This is not the same as “**trial**” or “**probe**” in Greek. Trial is “*an experimental action, involving suffering.*” I’m stopping to bring this distinction to our attention because, until today, I have interpreted “testing” and “trial” as the same thing...and they are not at all.

God tests; the Adversary tries.

It is clear from verse 4 in 1st Thessalonians that it is “*God, Who is testing our hearts.*”

Also, recall our study of a few weeks ago where we read God Himself declare, in **Malachi 3:10** - “*Test me in this, says the LORD Almighty.*”

Here are some other examples:

Exodus 16:4

Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way **I will test them** and see whether they will follow my instructions.

Exodus 20:20

Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. **God has come to test you**, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”

Deuteronomy 8:16

He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, **to humble and test you** so that in the end it might go well with you.

Judges 3:1

These are the nations **the LORD left to test** all those Israelites who had not experienced

any of the wars in Canaan...

Judges 3:4

They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the LORD's commands, which he had given their ancestors through Moses.

Who left those nations to test the Israelites?

Here's King David:

1 Chronicles 29:17

I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity.

2 Chronicles 32:30-31

Hezekiah...succeeded in everything he undertook. ³¹ But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.

Job 7:17-18

¹⁷ "What is mankind that you make so much of them, that you give them so much attention, ¹⁸ that you examine them every morning and test them every moment?"

Jeremiah 12:3

Yet you know me, LORD; you see me and test my thoughts about you.

Now look at the word, "try." I'll make this quick...

James 1

13 Let no one, undergoing trial, be saying that "From God am I undergoing trial," for God is not tried by evils, yet He is trying no one.

14 Now each one is undergoing trial when he is drawn away and lured by his own desire.

Matthew 4

1 Then Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the spirit to be tried by the Adversary.

2 And, fasting forty days and forty nights, subsequently He hungers.

3 And, approaching, the trier said to Him, "If you are God's Son, say that these stones may be becoming cakes of bread."

1 Thessalonians 3:5

when I also could by no means longer refrain, I send to know of your faith, lest somehow the trier tries you and our toil may be coming to be for naught.

Luke 11:4

And mayest Thou not bring us into trial, but rescue us from the wicked one.

Trial and the adversary go hand in hand. The goal of “the trier” is to destroy faith in and obedience to God. It was that way in the garden at the beginning of the scriptures, and it is no different today. God does not try. That’s Satan’s job. Certainly he’s allowed, but within limits:

1 Corinthians 10:

13 No trial has taken you except what is human. Now, faithful is God, Who will not be leaving you to be tried above what you are able, but, together with the trial, will be making the sequel also, to enable you to undergo it.

I went into detail about this whole subject in my book, **GO GOD!** For now take note that the words, “*God, Who will not be leaving you,*” indicates that God supervises and determines the limits of a trial, but He isn’t the one doing the “dirty work.”

God’s goal during testing is to refine.

Zechariah 13:9

This third I will put into the fire; **I will refine them like silver and test them like gold.**

In 1st Thessalonians 2:4, Paul knew he and his associates were being tested. He knew WHY, and he knew Who was doing the testing! “Where are we being tested today?” The Father Who loves us is using those tests to refine us to make us more like Jesus. On the other hand, are we tried today? If we are, that area of character that is vulnerable to attack, is actually an idol we have worshipped above the Lord, and it needs broken to bits so that we recognize it unmistakably, repent of it, and re-form.

Ephesians 4:22-25

“...put off from you, as regards your former behavior, the old humanity which is corrupted in accord with its seductive desires, yet to be rejuvenated in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new humanity which, in accord with God, is being created in righteousness and benignity of the truth. Wherefore, putting off the false, let each be speaking the truth...”

Back to 1 Thessalonians 2 . . .

5 For neither did we at any time become flattering in expression, according as you are aware; neither with a pretense for greed, God is witness;

6 neither seeking glory from men, neither from you, nor from others, when we could be a burden as Christ's apostles.

Paul raises a high standard here: He could have insisted that the Thessalonians support him during his few weeks with them. He could have ingratiated himself with them,

snuggled up to them so they'd empty their pockets. He supported himself instead and the Philippians sent him aid during this time (Phil. 4:16).

1 Thessalonians 2:

7 But we became gentle in your midst, as a nurse should be cherishing her own children.

8 Thus being ardently attached to you, we are delighting to share with you not only the evangel of God, but our own souls also, because you came to be beloved by us.

This is just a picture of the Apostle's pure affection for this unique group of people, for whom he delighted to share his own soul; that is, to pour out his soul—the seat of his awareness and sensation as a human being—on their behalf...for their sakes.

1 Thessalonians 2:

9 For you remember, brethren, our toil and labor: working night and day so as not to be burdensome to any of you, we herald to you the evangel of God.

10 You are witnesses, and God, how benignly and justly and blamelessly we became to you who are believing,

11 even as you are aware how we were to each one of you, as a father to his own children, consoling and comforting you and attesting unto you

12 to be walking worthily of God, Who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Paul changed the picture from that of a nursing mother to that of a father who looks after the welfare of his children.

1 Thessalonians 2:

13 And therefore we also are thanking God unintermittingly that, in accepting **the word heard from us, from God you receive**, not the word of men, but, **according as it truly is**, the word of God, which is operating also in you who are believing.

This is a bold statement indeed: *"Hearing from us, you received from God HIS word as it truly is. Let there be no doubt that what you heard from us was from God, just as surely as if He were standing among you. We matter not at all, but His is the true word. And notice the result in those who believe it...that word—the same one you heard from us—is operating in you. It is alive right now and working its way throughout your character."* Paul was all about the preaching—the word—not the preacher. Beware when you hear a good preacher. The question is, are you hearing the true word of God? That's all that matters. The one speaking ought to disappear so that the word is what is apparent, penetrates and operates in you!

I pray that our studies together bring about the same result...that we share the true word of God; that is His voice that penetrates your heart and mind, and that, as you receive His word and believe it, you find it operating in you...daily, in every area of your life. Otherwise, this is a purely academic exercise and we ought to shut it down right now!

1 Thessalonians 2:

14 For you became imitators, brethren, of the ecclesias of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you suffered the same, even you by your own fellowtribesmen, according as they also by the Jews,

Paul uses the term, “fellowtribesmen,” to cement the example of the Thessalonians as springing from a single ancestor, as every Jew does. Jews are to this day identified by their ancestral tribe. The word itself means, literally, “*sprout*,” as in “springing from a single ancestor.” Paul says, “*You guys became just like the Jewish Christians back in Judea. You suffered at the hands of your own brothers...members of your own family, just like they did.*”

Now Paul is about to indict *his* fellowtribesmen, still liking them to those of the Thessalonians, to illustrate how contrary the apostate Jews are to God. Remember, Paul’s audience—non Jews—was once pagan and therefore entirely outside of any hope in Christ Jesus. What a massive irony it is that God’s own chosen people—the ones to whom He appeared and to whom the promises were given—have become the example of contrariness to God!

1 Thessalonians 2:

15 who kill the Lord Jesus as well as the prophets, and banish us, and are not pleasing to God, and are **contrary** to all men, **[these guys are opposed to everyone, as adversaries, hostile, antagonistic in feeling or act!]**

16 **forbidding** **[preventing, hindering, denying]** us to speak to the nations that they may be saved, to fill up their sins always.

Paul says, “*These just don’t want you pagans to be saved! And, in trying to hinder us and withhold the evangel of God from you, they’re adding to their own sins!*” This reminds me of the sniping that goes on today in Christendom, where one denomination contends that no other believers can be saved who don’t hold to their particular brand of or formula for believing. Perhaps this hindrance is not widespread, but where it exists, it results in extraordinary intolerance, and usually has its disciples bound up in all kinds of religious structure that is void of the Holy Spirit.

Pauls ends with this last part of verse 16:

Yet the indignation outstrips to them to a consummation.

He says, *“Never mind. Not to worry, the indignation I spoke of before will overtake them in the end. God’s word is final.”*

It’s instructive to recall that a foretaste of *“the indignation”* came when the Roman Emperor, Titus, laid siege to Jerusalem and razed the temple for the last time before Christ’s return – in 70AD – about 20 years after Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians. That “indignation” is nothing compared to *“The Indignation of God”* that is yet to come, to which Paul referred to in his first chapter of this letter, and which he declared the Thessalonians to be immune (and we by extension).

God will not be mocked. People can believe whatever they want...God’s word stands and will surely come to pass completely and exactly as it is written.

1 Thessalonians 2

17 Now we, brethren, being bereaved of you **“torn from you”** for the period of an hour, in face, not in heart, endeavor the more exceedingly to see your face, with much yearning,

18 because we want to come to you, indeed, I, Paul, once -- even twice -- and Satan hinders us.

19 For who is our expectation, or joy, or wreath of glorying? Or is it not even you, in front of our Lord Jesus, in His presence?

20 For you are our glory and joy.

We see such a clear picture of Paul’s affection for the Thessalonians, a former pack of idol-worshipping, pagan reprobates, who have become a shining example to every other ecclesias and as dear to Paul as his own family – dearer actually, because we read nothing of a desire to see them! These guys in Thessalonica were Paul’s real brothers and sisters. They were, as Jesus said, *“those who do the will of My Father.”*

Chapter 3

1 Wherefore, when we could by no means longer refrain, it seems well for us to be left in Athens alone,

2 and we send Timothy, our brother and God’s servant in the evangel of Christ, to establish and to console you for the sake of your faith.

3 No one is to be swayed by these afflictions, for you yourselves are aware that we are located for this.

Paul wanted badly to get back to Thessalonica. Remember, he’d only been with the brethren there for a few weeks. Not only was he forced to leave by the persecution that

still raged around them, but, as he stated in Chapter 2, verse 2:18, Satan hindered him twice from returning. So, to keep them shored up in the faith, he sent Timothy who, even though much younger, was apparently up to the task, despite the hardship he would undoubtedly face.

Verse 3 contains an interesting phrase: *“No one is to be swayed by these afflictions, for you yourselves are aware that we are located for this.”* Referring to the persecution—the afflictions—Paul says, *“we are located for this.”* The word *“located”* in Greek, is the same word as “lie.” It means, *“figuratively, immovable by any law”* (CLNT-KC); Thayer’s lexicon says, *“quietly covering some spot; like a city situated on a hill; put or set in any place, as in, “to stand”; like a throne, the site of a city; a foundation; metaphorically, to be (by God’s intent) set, i.e. destined, appointed.”*

1 Thessalonians 3

4 For even when we were with you, we predicted to you that “we are about to be afflicted,” according as it came to be also, and you are aware.

5 Therefore, when I also could by no means longer refrain, I send to know of your faith, lest somehow **the trier tries you** and our toil may be coming to be for naught.

We’re back to where we started this evening. God tests; Satan—“the trier”—tries. If his trying succeeds, Paul’s efforts could be in vain. He’s not about to let that happen. Now, the fact is that, by the end of his life, Timothy and Titus may have been the only two left who were mature enough to be entrusted by Paul with carrying on the ministry. The trier can appear to succeed for a time...perhaps even a long time as we humans reckon time; however God’s eonian purpose moves ahead on schedule. The trier is simply given opportunities to attempt delay and destruction. Ultimately, however, he is an instrument that assists the fulfillment of God’s purpose. You Go, God!

Father, we do just stop everything here to worship You and give You all honor and Glory. Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth, and in and through our lives, as it is in the heavens. Thank you for providing for us today, Holy Father; for meeting every need according to Your riches in Glory in Christ Jesus. Thank you for Your overwhelming grace; Your unfathomable kindness and faithfulness to us. May we display those qualities among others as we walk as witnesses to the celestials. Father, I pray Your light shine so brightly from within us that others see You and not us. Keep us from trial and from the trier, I pray, in Jesus’ name. You are the Lord and there is no other. We look only to You, serve only You, and cry out with all the love and affection our frail hearts and limited

minds can muster, "Abba," "Papa," "Father." We bless You, Father. We bless your name and praise You, in Jesus' name. AMEN.