

Men's and Women's Fellowship 2014:

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13 Study Guide

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Preparing to Discover God's Revelation to His People:

- Review Reading: Acts 17-18; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2:16 (As you review previous passages, make use of the "Review of Past Discoveries" below.)
- Review of Past Discoveries
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10: Paul gave thanks to God for the Thessalonian believers for three main reasons:
 - ✓ Their Christ-Centered Character (3)
 - ✓ Their Election (4-7)
 - ✓ Their Known and Reported on Testimony (8-10)*1 Thessalonians 2:1-16*: Paul declared that the apostolic ministry among the Thessalonians was not in vain as evidenced both through the apostolic ministry and the reception of that apostolic ministry.
 - ✓ Non-vain ministry is marked by bold gospel ministry in the middle of opposition
 - Which is characterized by pleasing God rather than men (3-4)
 - Which is characterized by the genuine gentle affection of a mother (5-8)
 - Which is characterized by the selfless proclamation and exhortation of a father (9-12)
 - ✓ Non-vain ministry is marked by the reception of apostolic Words as God's Words (13-16)
- Present Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

Discovering the structure

- Read through the text several times and try to determine where the topic changes or distinct movements within the flow of the text are that signal new sections.
- Though it is possible to break this text down in different ways, if there were four sections what would they be?

Discovering the theme

Where the theme is often found..

It has been pointed out that often people keep their keys either near the front or back door. If every text of Scripture is viewed as a house the key (the theme) to the house (the passage) is often found at the front door (beginning of the text) or the back door (end of the text).

- With this in mind, what do you think this passage is about in one sentence?

- If in fact this passage is in four sections, how do those four sections develop that theme?
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

Discovering the meaning

- As you read this passage you will notice that "we" and "I" are used both referring to at least the author. Read through the text and try to determine who the "we" and the "I" refer to:

- In 2:17 when Paul speaks of "having been taken away from you for a short while" what short time period is he talking about?

- According to 2:18 the reason that they could not return to visit the Thessalonians was that Satan had hindered them.
 - We are not told exactly how Satan hindered the apostolic company from returning, but does 2:14-16 shed any light on how Satan hindered them?

 - Does the fact that Satan hindered them from returning mean that somehow Satan was in total control? If no, what verse in this passage refutes that very idea?

- Does Paul always blame Satan for why he may or may not be able to go to a certain place for the sake of the gospel (see Acts 16:6 to answer this question)?

- How do you think Paul knew that it was Satan who was hindering him from going back to Thessalonica?

- Would it have also been biblical for Paul to say that God hindered him from returning to Thessalonica even though Paul said “Satan hindered us?” _____

The many forms of opposition from Satan

*The devil tempted Christ (Matthew 4:3-10); he opposes the gospel (Matt. 13:19; 2 Cor. 4:4); he performs counterfeit miracles (Ex. 7:11; Acts 8:9-24; 13:8; cf. 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 16:14); he seeks to deceive believers (2 Cor. 11:3, 14; Eph. 6:11); he perpetrates lies and murders (1 Kings 22:22; John 8:44); he attacks individual churches (Acts 5:1-11; Rev. 2:9, 13, 24; 3:9); and he especially attacks spiritual leaders (Job 1:6-2:8; Luke 22:31-32; 2 Cor. 12:7-9; 1 Tim. 3:7) (From page 73 in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1 & 2 Thessalonians*).*

- Why do you think Paul is so careful to explain how they and specifically he wanted to revisit them (17-19)?

- Notice the connecting word “for” in 2:19. What is the connection between verses 17-18 and 19?

- In 2:19-20 Paul looks forward to that future day when he will be rewarded in heaven for ministry in the gospel. He speaks of his (their) hope, joy or crown of exultation. What does Paul anticipate will be his crown on that day? _____

- Certainly Christ is our hope (Colossians 1:27) and God is the hope of the blessed (Jeremiah 17:7), but subsumed under those big realities is the fact that Paul viewed the Thessalonians as His hope. Hope for what?

- If true joy is deep-seated satisfaction in God alone, how can it be legitimate to say that certain people will be our joy in the future?

How old was Timothy at this time?

This was Timothy’s first big assignment. Paul had added him to the team on the second missionary journey (See Acts 16:1ff) and mentored him to be a faithful minister for Christ. Around 15 years later Paul would say to Timothy: “Let no one look down on your youthfulness” (1 Timothy 4:12). The term “youth” was used of young men up to age 40. Therefore, Timothy was no older than 25 at the time of this mission. It is very possible he was younger than that. What a remarkable responsibility to represent the ministry of the Apostle Paul at that young age and in such a volatile situation as the church at Thessalonica was in.

- Satan hindered Paul, Timothy, and Silas from returning to Thessalonica *together*. Since Paul really desired to know what was going on with this new church plant. What was his solution according to 3:2? _____

How does 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 fit with Acts 17-18?

Acts 17 is clear that Paul was alone in Athens and speaks nothing of Silas being with him. But 1 Thessalonians 3:2 speaks of Paul and Silas sending Timothy to Thessalonica (3:12) from Athens. Acts 17:15 speaks of Paul being in Athens and that Silas and Timothy were commanded to come to him there as soon as possible. However, the Acts narrative does not record that they ever returned to Athens to be with Paul. Commentator D. Edmond Hiebert helps us see how these differences are harmonized by pointing out that the best reconciliation “is to accept that Silas and Timothy did come to Athens as requested [though not recorded in the Acts narrative]. They probably brought fresh news of the viciousness of the Thessalonians Jews. Upon their arrival at Athens all three felt such deep concern for the Thessalonian believers that it was decided that Timothy should hurry back to Thessalonica. The adjective alone, standing forcibly last, indicates that Timothy was missed by Silvanus and Paul. Apparently Silas was also soon dispatched on a mission to Macedonia, leaving Paul all alone in his work at Athens as Acts says he was. From Acts 18:5 it is clear that Silas and Timothy had both been in Macedonia before rejoining Paul at Corinth” (Page 134 in *The Thessalonian Epistles*).

- Paul says that the Thessalonians are destined for what (3:3)?

- In 3:3 we are told that Paul was concerned that they not be disturbed by the afflictions they were enduring. In essence, he points out that having a proper expectation about afflictions dispels the anxiety and fear of the affliction. In light of the following passages, what does Paul mean that the Thessalonians were destined for affliction (2 Timothy 3:12; John 16:33; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 5:10)?

- Paul tells us in 3:5 that Timothy was sent in order to see the state of their faith in Christ. He knew that Satan had hindered him from returning, therefore he was confident that Satan was attacking them as well. So the question Paul had was essentially “how has the faith of the Thessalonians held up under these pressures?” If it had not,

then their labor among the Thessalonians would have been in vain or without result. How can Paul give thanks for their election in 1:4 and then say in 3:5 that he didn’t know if their ministry among the Thessalonians was in vain or not?

- Why do you think it was so encouraging to Paul that the Thessalonians still felt kindly toward them (3:6)? _____

- Think back through what we have already studied in this book and identify where Paul recounts what he knew to be true and heard from Timothy about the Thessalonians _____
- According to 3:7 what encouraged Paul, Timothy, and Silas in their distress? _____
- What do you think Paul means in 3:8 when he says “For now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord?” _____

- In one or two words, try to summarize the nature of Paul’s thanksgiving in 3:9: _____
- Paul, Timothy, and Silas all prayed that they would be able to revisit them. Did the Lord ever grant this request from Paul (consider Acts 19:21-22; 20:1-6; 1 Cor. 16:5; 2 Cor. 1:16; 1 Tim. 1:3)?

- Even though Paul wants to revisit them to “complete what is lacking” in their faith, how does v. 11 demonstrate that Paul knows God is the one who sanctifies and builds His people up in the faith?

- Who does Paul mean in v. 12 when he says “may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love...for all people?”

- Can you think of another passage where Paul prays for love to abound in the life of believers? _____

Discovering how this applies

- Read through the text and identify every evidence of Paul's (and the apostolic company's) love for the Thessalonians and list them below: _____

- Are those evidences of love present in your life for those that you minister to (e.g. in shepherding, discipling, parenting, teaching etc.)?
- If (in light of 2:19-20) future rewards have to do with the people that we minister to, how should this inform ministry philosophy and our approach to whatever service we carry out for the Lord in the local church?

- In 3:2 Timothy is called "God's fellow worker." What does this tell you about God's sovereignty and His ordinary way of using people to accomplish His plans?

- In 3:2 Paul says that Timothy was sent to "strengthen and encourage" the Thessalonians as to their faith. How did Timothy do this? If you were sent by this church to another group of believers, how would you strengthen and encourage their faith? How could you do so here at TBC?

- As you consider 3:3, what are your expectations in a broken world? Have you recognized that this is a broken world that is full of loss and suffering and that no one is immune to it? Are you submitted to God who rules in the brokenness and wields it for your good and His glory even when that means ordaining that you experience a major portion of this world's brokenness?
- Based on 3:3-4, is it the biblical responsibility of a pastor to remind the flock that they will suffer in this world? What would it say about a pastor that did not give such reminders?

- If the fears of Paul in 3:5 were realized what soil would the Thessalonians have evidenced themselves to be? But what soil did they evidence they were (See Matthew 13:18-23)? What soil are you?

- If the apostolic company was encouraged in their distress by the faith of Thessalonians during their distress (3:7), what kinds of situations can we encourage one another with faith today?

- In light of verse 8, what does it imply about a person who ministers to others when they are affected in their spirit over whether or not those individuals are flourishing in Christ or floundering? Are you that concerned with the spiritual wellbeing of others? Is your own response to God's Word through those that teach you an encouragement or discouragement?

- What does it tell you about the nature of Paul, Timothy, and Silas as ministers of the gospel that they were praying for the Thessalonians and concerned for them even after they were no longer with them (3:10)? Do you remain concerned for people you ministered to in the past?

- Why do you think it would be if we rarely if ever know the joy that Paul is talking about here in 3:10 (i.e. the joy before God over the spiritual growth in the lives of other believers)?

- In 3:6 Paul commends them for their love. So why would Paul say what he does in 3:12? _____
- What is the connection between abounding love and holiness? Do you consider an unloving spirit toward others as being unholy? Do you think of loving others and holiness as opposed to each other?
