

**Introduction:** These notes on 1 Thessalonians are to impress upon us the value of the Word of God preached and lived by those who bring that Word to us. Just as Rahab learned to treasure the Word of God which came to her ears and moved her to plead for mercy from the God of Israel before her city was destroyed (Joshua 2); just as the Thessalonians experienced the Word of God in its converting power, and valued the Apostles who brought it to them; so we this week learn to value the letters of the New Testament in particular – as we focus on the great mental and physical toll which the foes of the Gospel exacted from Paul in their efforts “to prevent him from preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles.” These mighty foes caused Paul to speak about being “hindered by Satan” in 1 Thess. 2:17 and caused him to fear that “his work might have been in vain.” But be not afraid for the cause of Christ dear beloved Apostle! Your Gospel did spread and God ensured that the church world-wide was “strengthened and encouraged in their faith” (See 1 Thess. 3:2) by that Word you preached – which God has promised will never return to Him void!

**Monday: read 1 Thessalonians 2:15-3:2 & 2 Corinthians 11:21-30.** We are left in no doubt as to the source of Paul’s sufferings, pain and deprivation in 1 Thess. 2 and 2 Cor. 11. As James Denney wrote about Paul’s Jewish foes:

*It is quite plain that Paul was suffering from those who never ceased to vex him while he lived. These enemies were the Jews. When they had opportunity, they used open violence; they roused the Gentile mob against him; they had him scourged and stoned. When his body was out of their reach, they assailed him through his character and affections. They crept into the churches which his love and zeal had gathered, and scattered injurious suspicions against him among his disciples. “He was not, they hinted, all that he seemed to be. They could tell stories about his early days, and advised those who did not know him so well to be on their guard. Evangelizing paid him quite as well as harder work, and his paltry ambition was gratified by lording it over his ignorant converts.”*

*Such messengers of Satan had apparently made their appearance in Thessalonica since Paul left, and 1 Thessalonians 2 is his reply to their insinuations. There is something exquisitely painful in the situation thus created. It would have been like a sword piercing the Apostle’s heart, had his enemies succeeded in their attempt to breed distrust in the Thessalonians toward him. He could not have borne to think that those whom he loved so utterly should entertain the faintest suspicion of the integrity of his love.*

Meditate and Pray: No wonder Paul declares in 1 Thess. 3:1-2 that he could “stand it no longer” and therefore sent Timothy back to Thessalonica - though it cost him greatly in terms of being left “all alone” in Athens! As Christ’s under-shepherd, he could not stand the thought of that “roaring lion” Satan in the midst of the flock of new Christians at Thessalonica. See how the Spirit of Christ worked in him, and in Timothy, to courageously send to find out the condition of the sheep back in Thessalonica!

**Tuesday: read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-19 and John 14:18.** One further source of Paul’s anguish was the way in which he had been “torn away” from those he loved and driven out of Thessalonica by persecuting Jews. He literally says in 1 Thess. 2:17 that he was “torn away” from the Thessalonians as a parent being torn away from its child. The Greek verb, “tear away,”

here even looks like the word “orphan”: ‘aporpanizw’! In this way, Satan, that great “roaring lion,” comes against the church, seeking to rend whole flocks of sheep, scattering them on every hillside, and then seeking to convince them in their despair that no one cares and that they are now all alone.

Meditate and Pray: Thank Jesus for His unconditional promise to every believer in John 14:18 that “He will not leave us orphans, but will come to us.” Even if we have been “torn away” from all other believers and loved ones on whom we relied, He will prove “closer than a brother.” After all, the biblical history is full of lonely saints who nevertheless found that the Lord constantly walked with them through their lonely lives. Even if we walk through the darkest “valley of the shadow,” we can say with the Psalmist: “Thou art with me.”

**Wednesday: read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:1 and Psalm 61:1-4.** We learned yesterday that wherever we are cast in trials or tempted by sin and Satan; no matter our state of forsakenness in this lonely world, we may still call upon the Lord. As 1 Thess. 3:1 teaches, Paul was in a great state of weakness, “left alone in Athens” where his sensitive spirit was oppressed and distressed by the sight of a city given over to idols (Acts 17:16). Yet the Lord came to him in that desolated state of mind. Did we not also learn this lesson from the Psalm 61:2, 4 in 2011, despite all the heart-breaking losses which some of us experienced? As I wrote last spring, quoting that Psalm:

*“From the ends of the earth I call to you ... I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings” (Ps. 61:2, 4) ... Thank God for the universal nature of His care for His people. Even if it is sinful folly or the deepest grief which has driven us away from God, we can still return to Him, confessing with Jonah that “we worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land” (Jonah 1:9).*

**Thursday: read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5.** Though Paul does proclaim with great relief that “his labors in the Gospel” in Thessalonica were not in vain (1 Thess. 2:1), he, nevertheless, must also honestly describe his weakness and fear because his Gospel work had indeed been “hindered by Satan” during his short stay in Thessalonica. According to 1 Thess. 3:5, Paul was afraid that in some way the Tempter’s temptations of the Thessalonians might have rendered his Gospel efforts “useless.” Moreover, this fear was shared by his fellow-workers Silas and Timothy. It got to the point that all of them “could stand it no longer” and therefore, sent Timothy to find out the state of the Thessalonian church in 1 Thess. 3:1-2.

Meditate and Pray: Let us honestly acknowledge the great cost of real Gospel labor, and resolve to pray all the more earnestly for those leaders in our churches who carry the burden of that constant fear that “their work has been in vain.” Use hymn # 574 as your prayer for the strength and vigilance of all the sheep in your church family, including your leaders:

*Christian, dost thou see them on the holy ground,  
How the powers of darkness rage thy steps around?  
Christian, up and smite them, counting gain but loss,  
In the strength that cometh by the holy cross.*

*Christian, dost thou hear them, how they speak thee fair?  
“Always fast and vigil? Always watch and prayer?”  
Christian, answer boldly: “While I breathe I pray!”  
Peace shall follow battle, night shall end in day.*

**Friday: read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 and 2 Corinthians 11:27.** Can it really be that great heroes of the faith like Paul could actually grow discouraged in Gospel work and be worried that “their efforts might prove useless”, (1 Thess. 3:5)? Well is it okay to say of the Apostle that sometimes his faith flagged and he was “weakened, fearful and even trembling” because of the opposition he faced? 1 Corinthians 2:3 uses exactly that language to describe Paul’s arrival in Corinth having been “beaten up” so severely not only in Philippi, but in every Macedonian city where he preached – including Thessalonica! As James Philip puts it, commenting on a helpful autobiographical statement in 2 Cor. 11:27, which well describes the suffering of mind which Paul at times experienced after suffering as he did in places like Thessalonica:

*What do we suppose these words mean? They mean that Paul had occasions and experiences in which he was not ‘on top of the world’ but desperately weary, pained in mind and spirit, and with the sentence of death upon himself, despairing even of life.*

Meditate and Pray: How we all, like the Apostle Paul, need constant reminders from the Lord that our labors are not in vain, and that He is “not unjust to forget our labors in the Lord.” May these words from Frederick Faber from the Scottish Hymnal encourage you today:

*Workman of God! O lose not heart,  
But learn what God is like;  
And in the darkest battlefield  
Thou shalt know where to strike.*

*Thrice blest is he to whom is giv’n  
The instinct that can tell  
That God is on the field, when He  
Is most invisible.*

*Then learn to scorn the praise of men,  
And learn to lose with God;  
For Jesus won the world through shame,  
And beckons thee His road.*

*For right is right, since God is God,  
And right the day must win;  
To doubt would be disloyalty,  
To falter would be sin.*