

1 Thessalonians

Chapter 2

The Aegean seaport of Thessalonica in Greece was founded in 316 B.C., named for Alexander the Great's sister. In 1943 the Nazis sent 60,000 Jews from there to concentration camps where most of them died. Only about 1,200 Jews live there now.

In A.D. 50 God's first envoy to Europe, Paul, a Jew and Roman citizen, comes to this pagan sinkhole of immorality. He brings the groundbreaking news that we're now set right with God by trusting in Jesus Christ, not by living right (Romans 4:4-8).

Israel's prophets had predicted God would visit earth to die for the sins of all mankind. Paul says all these prophecies were fulfilled in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus, their Messiah (Micah 5:2; Isaiah 53:3-12). Some Jews in Thessalonica chose to follow Jesus, but mostly Greeks and Romans responded.

Paul exits when jealous Jews hire a rabble to accuse him of sedition and treason against Caesar. Paul writes to the Thessalonians who, 'though persecuted mercilessly for their faith, get major props from Paul for being all in for God. Luke journals this leg of Paul's second of three missionary tours: (Acts 17:1-11).

DISCUSS: Why does telling others the Gospel often require courage?

Let's read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-20.

Paul's Bona Fides

1 Thessalonians 2:1-7a

Paul affirms that his time with them had not been a flop but had birthed an exemplary church. He realizes that some might mistake him as just another head case, but he assures his readers that the Lord Himself had commissioned him to announce that we're "saved" by God's grace, not by good deeds or being religious.

In his Pharisee years Paul (as Saul) had been militantly legalistic, driven by "what *I should do* for God." By contrast, being "born again," as Jesus called it, is about having faith in "what *God has done* for me" (**1 Timothy 4:1-10**).

DISCUSS: Why and how has this beautiful truth been rejected by many?

Perhaps the greatest Christian leader ever, Paul wrote as led by God's Spirit. Thus what we read is how God describes this former cold-blooded killer of Christians who was transformed in a roadside meeting with the risen Christ. Who could say with a straight face, as Paul did, that he only says what God wants him to say!

DISCUSS: How can you discern if someone is selling spiritual snake oil?

Walking the Talk ***1 Thessalonians 2:7b-12***

Paul could've fleeced, flattered and flashed his platinum apostles card, demanding a retainer. But expecting nothing from his flock, he moonlighted as a tentmaker with a clear conscience before God (1 Corinthians 9:10b-23; Psalm 139:1-12).

Paul loved the new converts tenderly, protectively, teaching them to know God and to live up to their new position as Christ's kids. For this honor, in addition to being whipped, beaten and jailed, Paul was beheaded by Nero in A.D 67 or 68 (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

The Cost of Saving Faith ***1 Thessalonians 2:13-20***

OpenDoorsUSA.org says believers are tormented in more than 65 countries today. North Korea, #1 on the list for 13 years in a row, puts saints in labor camps or kills them. Each month, reports ChristianFreedom.org, 322 believers around the world are martyred. Paul's gospel emboldens believers with supernatural grit (Hebrews 13:3; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 25-26).

DISCUSS: What's the "cost" of serving Jesus in our "whatever" culture?

Paul's readers had received him as authentic, not as one who plays fast and loose with Truth by promoting "the god you *want*" instead of "the God who *is*" (Psalm 115:1-13).

DISCUSS: Describe how living by Biblical truth is politically incorrect.

Check this from one local church's, PC, tolerance-at-all-costs website:

"With historical roots in the Jewish and Christian traditions, (ours) is a liberal religion that keeps an open mind to the religious questions people have struggled with in all times and places. We believe that personal experience, conscience and reason are the final authorities, and that in the end religious authority lies not in a book or person or institution, but in ourselves."

DISCUSS: How would you justify or refute this position?

Rome's jihad against Christians scattered them across Europe, spreading the gospel. When it reached America, that cruelty ultimately benefited us. God can even use what's evil to accomplish good for us (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20).

DISCUSS: How have you personally experienced this?

Beth Moore writes, “(Satan) wants to destroy our lives, our calling, our sense of godly significance, our personal intimacy with God, and every relationship that matters to us” (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Satan wants to prevent us from placing our full confidence in the astounding fact that God forgave ALL our sins when His Son Jesus took them to the cross, and they were buried with them. To accept His total, permanent pardon, you must simply endorse it by faith! What could possibly be more important than doing that today?

His Deal

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