

Response to Paul's Ministry

1 Thessalonians: 2:11-20

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1 Thessalonians 2:11-20 – (NIV)

¹¹ For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. ¹³ And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. ¹⁴ For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews ¹⁵ who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone ¹⁶ in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last. ¹⁷ But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. ¹⁸ For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. ¹⁹ For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? ²⁰ Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

v11-12 – What analogy did Paul offer up for how he treated them when he was among them?

He dealt with them as a father deals with his own children, teaching them what they needed to know out of loving kindness.

- Paul himself lived **justly and blamelessly**, but he also told the Thessalonians they should live the same way.

The NKJV uses the word exhorting instead of encouraging; what does that add?

Exhort is defined as to strongly encourage or urge someone to do something.

- Encouraging can be passive, subtle and manipulative; whereas, exhortation is more assertive, aggressive and urgent.

What was Paul exhorting the Thessalonians to do?

To live their lives worthy of God... he could tell them that because his life and message were consistent.

v13 – What did Paul think of the message he shared with the Thessalonians?

Paul earnestly believed and taught others that God had spoken to man and that we have recorded this **word of God**.

- Since we do have this **word of God**, we have a true voice of authority that is above mere human opinion.

How should we respond to accusations that the Bible is subject to interpretation?

That is not true. Apparent contradictions are due to neglecting the context: historical, grammatical, doctrinal.

- On the essentials, the Bible is abundantly clear. There is nothing ambiguous about the deity of Christ, the reality of heaven and hell, and salvation by grace through faith.
- On some issues of less importance, however, the teaching of Scripture is less clear, and this naturally leads to different interpretations (disputable matters, Romans 14).

Why are there so many interpretations of the Bible?

Unbelief; It is impossible for an unbeliever to correctly interpret Scripture...

1 Corinthians 2:14 – *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned*

Lack of training; There is no shortcut to proper biblical interpretation; we are constrained to study...

2 Timothy 2:15 – *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth*

Poor hermeneutics; Taking a verse out of its immediate context can do great damage to the intent of the verse.

Ignorance of the whole Word of God; Apollos was a powerful and eloquent preacher, but he only knew the baptism of John. He was ignorant of Jesus and His provision of salvation, so his message was incomplete. Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and “explained to him the way of God more adequately” (Acts 18:24-28).

Selfishness and pride; Sad to say, many interpretations of the Bible are based on an individual’s own personal biases and pet doctrines.

Failure to mature; When Christians are not maturing, their handling of the Word of God is affected...

1 Corinthians 3:2-3 – *I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly*

Undue emphasis on tradition; Some claim to believe the Bible, but their interpretation is always filtered through the established traditions of their church.

How should we respond to accusations that the Bible needs to be updated for today’s culture?

No...

Hebrews 13:8 – *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

Updating for today’s culture is an euphemism for compromising with the world. We should indeed consider the cultural context when interpreting Scripture but that does not mean the underlying principles have to be changed.

Isaiah 40:8 – *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.*

v13 – How had the Thessalonians received the Word of God?

The Thessalonians received the **word of God** as **it is in truth**. Paul presented it **not as the word of men**, and the Thessalonians received it as **the word of God**.

What does it tell us when people do not recognize the Word of God as truth?

It reflects upon *them*, not upon the message.

- What a person thinks of God’s Word reveals what they think of God Himself.

What impact had recognizing the Word of God as truth had on the Thessalonians?

It transformed them... Paul’s confidence in the **word of God** wasn’t a matter of wishful thinking or blind faith, he could see that it **effectively works** in those **who believe**.

- God’s Word **works**, it doesn’t only bring information or produce feelings. There is power in the **word of God** to change lives.

v14 – What had happened when the Thessalonians responded to the gospel?

They became targets of persecution as the churches in Judea had experienced.

- The word of man isn’t worth suffering for, but a true message from God is worth it.

What does the use of the Greek word *ekklesia* tell us about the New Testament churches?

Christians passed over many Koine Greek words that were commonly used for religious brotherhoods in order to use the ancient Greek word *ekklesia*.

- The force of this is that Christianity is not just another religion. It is not to be named with any of the words proper to religions in general [of that day].

v15 – What comfort was there in the persecution of the Thessalonians?

Paul comforted these suffering Christians with the assurance that they were not the first to suffer this way.

The Lord Jesus faced persecution, and the Christians in **Judea** faced it first. Additionally, Paul and his associates were also **persecuted**.

Why did Paul single out the Judeans as having killed Jesus?

Certainly, the persecution of the Thessalonians was due to their own countrymen. But Paul knew well that the Jews of Judea were not the *only* ones responsible for the murder of Jesus. The Romans had their full share of guilt, so *both* Jew and Gentile were ultimately guilty.

How was it comforting to point out that their persecutors *displease God and are hostile to everyone*?

Paul also comforted the Thessalonian Christians with the awareness that *they* were right, that *they* are the ones pleasing God.

- This was necessary assurance because they were persecuted by religious people and might wonder if these other religious people were in fact right before God in their persecuting.

v16 – What were these religious persecutors doing that specifically displeased God?

Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved: Here Paul revealed what offended the religious persecutors of the Thessalonians so much. They were outraged that Gentiles could be saved without first becoming Jews.

- This exclusive attitude filled **up the measure of their sins**.

Why did Paul point out the consequences of the sins of the religious persecutors?

But wrath has come upon them to the uttermost: Paul comforted the Thessalonians by assuring them that God would indeed take care of their persecutors.

What problem do we make for ourselves when we forget that God will punish the evildoers?

When Christians forget this, they often disgrace and curse themselves by returning persecution for persecution towards others.

Romans 12:19 – *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.*

v17 – What comfort did Paul offer up here?

Paul knew that the Thessalonians appreciated the comfort he gave, but they wondered why he didn't come and bring this comfort in person.

- Paul assured them that the reason was not a lack of love or desire on his part.

v18 – What had kept Paul from visiting the Thessalonians?

Satan hindered us: Paul assured the Thessalonians that he desired to be with them, but he was hindered by Satan, and that this happened **time and again**.

What does it tell us that Paul didn't need to explain the concept of Satan to the mostly Gentile Thessalonians?

This shows that in the few weeks he was there, Paul taught the Thessalonians much about Satan and spiritual warfare.

How did Paul respond to the hinderance from Satan?

He did not just receive this Satanic hindrance in a fatalistic way. He did something about the hindrance...

- Paul recognized the *Satanic* hindrance; this was not a random circumstance, but a direct attack from Satan. Paul had the discernment to know.
- Paul had faith. **For a short time** means that Paul knew it would only be a **short time** until the roadblock was overcome.
- Paul was committed to fight against the roadblock any way he could. If he couldn't be there in person, his letter will go for him and teach and encourage them in his absence.

Do you think Satan thought he had a great victory in hindering Paul from visiting the Thessalonians?

Maybe initially, but not so much in retrospect...

- Many scholars believe that 1 Thessalonians was Paul's earliest letter written as an apostle to a church. If this is the case, then Satan's roadblock got Paul started on writing letters to the churches.
- When Satan saw the great work God did through these letters, he would have regretted that he ever **hindered** Paul at all.

Finally, God brought the victory. Acts 20:1-5 describes Paul's eventual return to Thessalonica and to other churches in the area.

v19-20 – What was Paul's hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?

Paul assured the Thessalonians that he could never forget them because they were his glory and his **joy**. His inability to visit should never be taken as a lack of love towards the Thessalonians.

- Perhaps Paul would say that he didn't need a crown in heaven because these precious ones were his crown of victory.
- Those whom we bring to Jesus and disciple are a crown of victory for us.

What can we take with us when we go to heaven?

Only the souls of those we've helped influence to trust in Jesus.

What applications come to mind from this passage?

- The Bible has many applications but only one true interpretation; don't let its detractors get away with it.
- There is comfort in God's Word; share it!
- God will ensure that justice is done; we do not need to seek retribution.
- Satan hinders our ministry but God can use even that to further His Word.