



PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE
THESSALONIANS

Lesson 4 • 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13
September 26, 2021



LESSON PLAN



Lesson	Date	Passage
1	9/5/2021	Introduction
2	9/12/2021	1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
3	9/19/2021	1 Thessalonians 2:1-16
4	9/26/2021	1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13
5	10/3/2021	1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
6	10/10/2021	1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
7	10/17/2021	1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
8	10/24/2021	2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
9	10/31/2021	2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
10	11/7/2021	2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
11	11/14/2021	2 Thessalonians 3:6-18
12	11/21/2021	Review
13	11/28/2021	Reading and Reflection

Passage Outline

- Fellowship's Desire (2:17-20)
- Fellowship's Envoy (3:1-5)
- Fellowship's Report (3:6-10)
- Fellowship's Prayer (3:11-13)



5 minutes – 11:10 to 11:15

- **Review** – In the last lesson's passage, Paul reviewed the character and nature of their ministry with the Thessalonians. They were...
 - Proclaiming and living the gospel, in spite of suffering and opposition
 - Living as an example for others to follow
 - Gentle as a nursing mother
 - Encouraging as a father to walk in a manner worthy of God
 - Thankful for the fruit and work of the Gospel
- Read the passage 1 Thes. 2:17-3:13
- Review outline – Paul speaks to their nature of fellowship.

Fellowship's Desire (v. 2:17-20)

- Their agonizing separation (v. 17)
- Their obstructed attempts (v. 18)
- Their hope and joy (v. 19-20)



10 minutes – 11:15 to 11:25

- If the Thessalonians didn't understand the depth of Paul's love and concern for them by this point in the letter, they will after on more reminder. In this first section of our text we see the strength of fellowship's desire. Beginning in verse 17, Paul shifts to remind the Thessalonians of their heartbreaking separation and their desire to be reunited in fellowship with them again. Note the strong emotional tone to these verses.
- **How does Paul convey this to them?**
 - We were "torn" away – not voluntarily; the Greek here is we were "orphaned" from you, probably connected to Paul's imagery of mother and father earlier in the text
 - In person; not in heart – physically, but not their fellowship (it is interesting how we can often be apart from believers, but pick right back up when we see them again)
 - Strived eagerly and with great desire to return face to face
- **Why was it important for Paul to let them know this?**
 - They might think that Paul had forgotten them
 - They would be encouraged to know Paul had tried to get back

- In verse 18, Paul continues by letting them know that they had tried to return but had been hindered. Note that Paul drops into a personal reference that he had tried himself, many times. This is not a sentiment of, oh well; we will come back as soon as it is convenient. The sense here is that Paul and his ministry team had tried hard and on multiple occasions to return. But Satan interfered and obstructed them from getting back to Thessalonica. While not the main point here, it reminds us that Satan is a real and powerful adversary. And at times, God allows him to impede and frustrate us. But despite these apparent set backs, we know that God is still sovereign and working out his good plans for his great good.
- In verse 19, Paul amplifies his point up another level. To be sure there is no doubt of his love and concern for them, Paul reminds them that they are a source of hope and great joy to he and his companions. Paul does this by asking two rhetorical questions that he provides the answer to.
- **How are the Thessalonians a hope and joy and crown at the time of Christ's coming?**
 - For their salvation and in anticipation of their entry into glory at Christ's coming – do we feel this way about other believers?
 - **What does the use of the word "crown" convey to us?** Idea of reward or recognition. Not in a bad sense, to fulfill a selfish ambition. But in a good sense of being present with them before God; joy that they are saved from God's wrath and preserved for an eternity with Christ
 - The idea here is of glory and joy in presenting the Thessalonian believers to God; this is the ultimate fulfilment of the Gospel in seeing salvation not just ourselves, but also those who we have encouraged and shared Christ with
 - Is joy and glory not multiplied when it is shared with others; and even more so when it shared with those that we love? (sports fan example, family example)

Fellowship's Envoy (v. 3:1-5)

- A faithful messenger (v. 1-2a)
- Unsettling troubles (v. 2b-4)
- A personal concern (v. 5)



10 minutes – 11:25 to 11:35

- Paul's desire for their fellowship is so strong, he decided to send an envoy to go and get news on how the Thessalonian believers were doing.
- We see the connection of this next section to the previous with the word "therefore." Paul and his companions hated being absent from the Thessalonians for so long. All of their attempts to get back to fellowship with them had been frustrated. So they take action.
- Now before we dig into these verses, I want to note the bookends at the beginning and end of these verses. Note how this passages starts out with "when **we** could bear it no longer, **we** sent" and ends in verse 5 with a parallel "when **I** could bear it no longer... **I** sent". These bookends mark the start and end of Paul's thought. Note also how Paul moves from the general concerns of the team to his own personal concerns for the believers in Thessalonica.
- Again, word "therefore" here in verse 1 is an important marker. It means that as we read the following verses, we are to keep in mind Paul's heartache and frustration that Paul felt at not being able to return and fellowship with them

face to face.

- **In verses 1 and first part of 2, What does Paul tell us happened during this period of waiting to return?**
 - They waited under the weight of agony and concern was too much for them
 - They evidently discussed what would be best to do
 - They determined that Paul and Silas would be left behind in Athens (based on Acts we know that eventually Paul would move on to Corinth, where he would be joined by Silas who had moved on to Macedonia, and that Timothy returned with a report from Thessalonica and met later)
 - They took the action of sending Timothy
- In the end of verse 2 and in verse 3 Paul gives us the why. **What is the purpose in sending Timothy?**
 - To strengthen and encourage them in their faith
 - That they would not be moved or unsettled; literally, to the wagging of the tail – to be shaken off the path or foundation; concern for the stability and strength as a church
- **What does Paul note in verses 3 and 4 regarding suffering?**
 - Something they had been taught and already knew; sense here is “you know very well”; as Christ suffered, so will His followers (2 Cor 1:5, 1 Pet 4:12) ; and seen in Paul’s example (Acts 9:16)
 - That as believers, they were destined to face or be placed into suffering (2 Tim 3:12); idea here is not a period of suffering, but that suffering would be the norm
 - It was now a part of the Thessalonians present reality; again something they well knew
- Lastly, Paul shifts to his personal concerns for them in verse 5.
 - This shift is meant to emphasize the personal nature and depth of Paul’s concern and anguish in waiting to hear how they were doing
 - **What was Paul’s personal motivation to send Timothy?** To learn about the course of their faith; and if they continuing along the path Paul had established. Concern about the impact to opposition and persecution.
 - Note that just as Satan had kept Paul from returning, he is concerned that the tempter had disrupted their fellowship and corrupted the church. Paul’s concern here is not that their effort was wasted, but for the effectiveness and continuity of the church as a whole. Paul’s distress is that after months of no news,
 - that the Thessalonian church might have given in to temptations to doubt God,

- that leadership would have given in to opposition and false teaching,
- and that their fellowship would collapse and ministry and mission of the church would amount to nothing.

Fellowship's Report (v. 3:6-10)

- Good news conveyed (v. 6)
- Encouragement in adversity (v. 7-8)
- Thanksgiving, joy, and prayers (v. 9-10)



10 minutes – 11:35 to 11:45

- After all the agonizing over the Thessalonian's well being, Paul quickly recounts the good report of their fellowship brought back by Timothy. It is likely that Paul writes this letter shortly after Timothy's return. Given Paul's wait for an update and his excitement to hear good news, we would expect this letter went out to be delivered to the Thessalonian believers very quickly.
- In verse 6, Paul recalls Timothy's return with a report of his visit. And he brings back them back very good news.
- **What did Timothy see and report back to Paul and Silas?**
 - They remember them kindly; in other words, they have joyful memories
 - They too longed to see Paul and his companions; they desire fellowship and felt the pangs of separation – there is a mutual desire to be together. The verb here that expresses this longing for reunion means "to desire intensely". It conveys the idea of the anxiousness or heartache that come with not getting a strong desire.
- In verse 7 the ESV starts "for this reason," . The idea here is the same as the word "therefore". Out their deep desire for fellowship and love, they were encouraged in the midst of hardship and persecution.

- **How does the faith of fellow believers encourage us in the midst of suffering?**
 - Encouragement of shared experiences
 - Knowing their suffering had a purpose; “For now we live, if you are standing fast”
- **What is the connection between the faith of others and persevering through suffering?**
 - Love and joy casts out the sting of fear and comforts the ache of suffering
- Verse 8 brings even more force to this encouragement. They are not just encouraged. The sense of Paul’s words is that they really live. They were renewed and revived by the news that the Thessalonians were standing firm in their faith in God. They had maintained their faith and endured persecution. Paul’s hope was not in vain.
- In verses 9 and 10, Paul again breaks out in thanksgiving. In studying this, I had the image in my head of Paul and his companions bursting out in joy and jumping up and down with gladness over the good report.
- **How does Paul record their joy?**
 - How could they ever thank God enough? Or what words could they ever say to express their thankfulness to God?
 - They were overflowing with an abundance of joy
 - They were moved to earnest prayer
 - **So when we hear encouraging news of others, do we just end in our joy or does it move us to sincere prayers?**
- **How does Paul describe their prayer?**
 - Most earnestly; intense and sincere, imploring God
 - At all times; night and day
 - To return and help them grow in faith

Fellowship's Prayer (v. 3:11-13)

- A petition to return (v. 11)
- A petition for abounding love (v. 12)
- A petition for holiness (v. 13)



10 minutes – 11:45 to 11:55

- In the last 3 verses of this chapter Paul breaks out in a prayer for fellowship.
- **How does Paul's prayer start in verse 11?**
 - With a petition for Paul and his companions to return to the Thessalonian believers; to clear the way, remove any obstacles (reference to earlier comments about Satan?)
- **What is the second part of Paul's prayer in verse 12?**
 - A petition for their love to grow and overflow; **their love for who?** One another and for all
- **Notice the "so that" at the beginning of verse 13? What is Paul connecting?** His ask for them to be able to return and their love to increase, so that..."
- **What is the last part of Paul's prayer in verse 13? What is the "so that"?**
 - That they would be presented before God, with hearts that were blameless in holiness at Christ's coming.
 - The ultimate aim of salvation and the gospel is that as many as believe will one day stand before God as blameless. Paul is reminding us that we have been given Christ's righteousness, we are without judgement because of what was accomplished on the cross. Christ exchanged his righteousness

for our unrighteousness. He exchanged his blamelessness for the judgement and wrath of God. He exchanged his death for our life. We will spend eternity in the glory of His presence.

- The prayer in Paul's letter here has several purposes.
 - First, it provides a summary of the main theme of the first part of the letter. That is Paul's desire to return to Thessalonica and his desire for their spiritual growth.
 - Second, the prayer serves as an encouragement to continue in love and to remain firm in faith.
 - Third, the prayer provides an example or a model for the Thessalonians.
 - Fourth, as the prayer was read in hearing of the church they participated in it.



5 minutes – 11:55 to 12:00

- What does the example of Paul's desire for fellowship teach us?