

# Who Should You Listen To

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*First Things*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5  
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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles in the New Testament to the book of 1 Thessalonians 3. Now as you turn to 1 Thessalonians 3, you may be a guest or visitor with us this morning, or you may have not have had the privilege of worshipping with us in some while, so allow me to kind of catch up very quickly. What we know as the book of 1 Thessalonians is a very strategic book of the Bible. In fact, I would say today it's a very timely book. Now I realize 2 Timothy 3 says that there is no scripture that is more important or less important than any other, all scripture is inspired by God, but I think we would all have to admit there are some passages that at times are a little more applicable than others, and such is 1 Thessalonians. It was the very first writings that the Lord gave the early church through whom today we refer to as the Apostle Paul, and the reason this is important is because many of the issues, the struggles, the contentions, even the debates that happened within our context today were not a part of the early church and so what this allows us to do, it allows us to kind of recapture what was the body of Christ designed to be? Who was the church designed to be? Because today, when you use the term Christian or the term Christianity, there are so many opinions, there are so many preferences, there are so many expressions and over time we've developed creeds and confessions and doctrines and this, and ultimately it's ended up with a whole lot of confusion. Well, 1 Thessalonians is designed for us strategically today to bring clarity.

Today, we're going to address the subject matter very timely: who should we listen to? There's a lot of voices that are out there. There's a lot of opinions, there's a lot of preferences, but today we're going to ask the question who should we listen to, and as we turn to chapter 3 of 1 Thessalonians, you know what we see is that the Apostle Paul was struggling because these new believers, this early church were starting to be impacted by voices and information that were contrary to what he had spoken to them when he had visited with him. And so this isn't just a story of 2,000 years ago, we're going to discover that this is our story as well.

Beginning verse 1 of chapter 3 it says,

1 Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; 2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of

God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: 3 That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. 4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. 5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

Now again, it just sounds somewhat like a casual warning or an air of caution that the Apostle Paul is giving but today I want to peel away some layers by asking some very basic questions to help us understand how relevant this scripture is to our lives today.

Let's begin with where it takes place. It's in Thessalonica. We've been at Thessalonica for about two months now, and so it just presumes that we understand and know where these people were living. However, Thessalonica was a very strategic place. It was a very strategic city for two reasons. Number 1, physically. It was located in what we call Macedonia. In fact, it was so influential that it became the capital of Macedonia. But why was it strategic? Because it was a trade route. It was a means of traveling north to south and vice versa. It could connect people from continent to continent, and more importantly, it could move goods from one location to another that people could not do in days prior to. So what we know as Thessalonica was a place that was well occupied by permanent residents, but this is important, it was often traveled through and visited by more people than lived there permanently. Why is that strategic philosophically? Because those individuals who visited and those individuals who passed through didn't just bring goods to trade, they brought ideas, they brought philosophies, they brought constructs that were shared in their passing.

Allow me to illustrate this both in a somewhat recent and more contemporary explanation. Some 60 years ago, there was an event that took place in our culture within pop culture that created a great strain, not just in the culture but in the homes of American families. We called it the British invasion. That's right, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and a host of other musical artists didn't just bring a sound that was different, they brought ideas that were different. In fact, in that same era, in that same time period, there were men and women who found themselves on the other side of the world fighting what you and I know as the Vietnam War, exposed to faiths they never even heard of, much less had explained, experiencing constructs and philosophies they never even dreamed existed, and all of a sudden you had all of these ideas traveling into what you and I know as our own personal culture. So let's fast forward to today. You no longer have to worry about a British invasion. You no longer have to worry about a war bringing ideas because you have a cell phone and that cell phone allows you to have access to every idea under the sun, every belief, every construct, every division, every debate. The one thing that none of you are lacking is an access to information. You and I are in the same place as they were, a traveling route not of physical goods but through the airwaves of the technology that we have access to. S

o when did the story take place? If you'll remember at the very beginning of our study, Acts 17 is a critical place. Acts 17 is the time period or the chronology when the Apostle Paul was writing to this group of believers and Acts 17 is kind of a blessed curse. Allow me to give you the blessing. The first half of Acts 17, here we find a man by the name of Jason. We find the early disciples that were making such an impact in Thessalonica, this place with the gospel that according to verse 6 of chapter 17, they were turning the whole world upside down. It's an incredible blessing to see the impact of the gospel, but then there's the backside of Acts 17. I want you to notice what it says in verse 1. It says, "We could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone." You say, "What's taking place there?" When you get to the middle part of Acts 17, the Apostle Paul goes on a vacation, a little R&R. He needs a break, we all do at sometime. But there in the city of Athens, it said the Spirit stirred him within. He could not stay silent because up on the hill there were philosophers and there were Stoics, and they were academicians who were verbally expressing all of these ideas that were contrary to Jesus Christ and he couldn't stay quiet. He had to go and be a part of the mix and there in verse 21 of chapter 17, I want you to hear what was happening in Athens. It says all they did was search for some new thing. Is that not who we've become? A new way to organize our family. A new way to do our finances. A new way to do this, a new way to do that. In fact, every time you turn around, thanks to the technology you have in your house and in your home, you cannot keep up with all the new stuff that is coming and that's all that our culture does today is come up with a new way of doing everything. Here's what the Apostle Paul is saying. He's like, "Guys, what I'm experiencing is headed your way. You need to be prepared for this."

So who does he send? He sends a man by the name of Timothy. I want you to notice how Timothy is described. This is important. It says in verse 2 he is a brother, he is a minister, and he is a fellow laborer. So it comes to whom we listen to, I want you to notice the first thing that Paul brings up: he is a fellow believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He's a brother. Now, why is that important? Because all this information that we have access to that is being traded on the airwaves of our lives, half the time we don't know who we're listening to. We don't know where they're from. And let me give you some of the greatest piece of advice. I know we live in a virtual world, and even e-books have covers to them, they're called pictures. Okay, we have them, right? Let me give you the greatest advice I can give you when it comes to digesting information: if you're going and looking at a book, the first thing you need to do is read the back flap. You say, "The back flap? I want to know about the story." No, find out about the author, what perspective are they coming from, because we're going to discover later in the message, it doesn't matter who that author is they've got an agenda. They've got a belief system. Every TV show, every movie, find out who produces it, find out who is directing it, because it may not happen season one, it may not happen season two, but eventually what they believe is going to come out in what they're producing and what they're writing.

And so what we discover is he begins by saying, "I'm sending Timothy to you, the number one first most important quality is he actually believes in Jesus like you do. You can trust what he says." He calls him then a minister. By calling him a minister, as we're talk in a moment, he edifies them, he comforts them, he's desiring the best for them. He's

a fellow laborer. He understands what it means to struggle. He understands what it means to be strong in the midst of adversity. In other words, even though we are subjected to so much information, I want you to hear what's happening here in 1 Thessalonians 3:2, the Apostle Paul is saying, "In light of all the information you are subjected to, be sure that when you filter it, you filter it in contrast, in comparison to what Timothy tells you. He is a brother. He's a fellow laborer and he is a minister," which leaves two very important questions: what was it that Timothy communicated and why do we need to understand it?

So let's begin with the "what." There was a very important message that Timothy brought. Notice what it says in verse 2, the gospel of Christ. Just because somebody – now hear me and I'm gonna go there this morning because for y'all it's early but for me it's in the afternoon. I'm good to go. Here we go – just because they say they're a Christian doesn't mean they know Jesus. Just because they hide under the umbrella of Christianity doesn't mean they understand the gospel of Christ. The gospel is that we are sinners in need of saving. We cannot earn it. We cannot buy it. It is by his blood and resurrection alone. That is the gospel of Christ. To call yourself a Christian is just to be able to write nine letters consecutively on a title above your name. The gospel of Christ.

Some years ago, and obviously you'll understand the years ago part of this, I had a dear acquaintance of mine and had the opportunity to have a 30 minute personal interaction with Dr. Billy Graham. Now folks, I'm not name dropping, I didn't know Dr. Graham and he didn't know me, but I have an acquaintance who spent 30 minutes with him. So that's pretty good for the sake of an illustration, but nonetheless, this friend of mine had an appointment at his office, this is several years ago, and he did exactly what I would have done or you would have done when he had an appointment, he arrived. 30 minutes early. You know, you just don't want to arrive late to meet with Billy Graham. You know, it's probably not a good idea. So nonetheless, he's there about 30 minutes early. He took a seat there in the waiting area. It was a very open office concept, he shared with me, and he began to notice that all over the room there were file cabinets everywhere. He began to kind of look and the person that was the receptionist could tell that he was kind of perusing the area and said, "Would you like to take a look?" He said, "What do you mean, take a look?" She said, "All these file cabinets you're looking at, these are all of the sermons of Dr. Graham. They're organized by date. Some of them are organized by location. They're organized by topic. They're organized by passage. There's multiple copies of all of them. Feel free. There's no locks, just just look through it." Well, can you imagine the excitement that would bring? So he began to peruse through these file cabinets. He's got 30 minutes nonetheless before his gathering. So he's going through and he shared with me this interaction. He turned to the receptionist and he asked this very naive but important question, "How many messages are here?" To which she replied, "Sir, there's thousands of sermons but there's only one message." That'll preach. When Timothy was sent to Thessalonica, basically what it's saying there is there's a lot of different ways to have values and principles and perspectives, but the gospel of Christ is the only and the one message by which all other communication must be filtered by and filtered through.

But notice the messenger, what does he say about him? He says that he will "establish you," in verse 2, he will "comfort you." Notice it doesn't say he'll take advantage of you and take from you. Establish, that means take where you are and to build you up. That means to take you from your present state and to challenge you to be more faithful, to challenge you to be more dedicated, to challenge you to love more, and to be more than you already are. And then there's comfort, When things aren't going the way that you would hope, when things are going "sideways," to be the shoulder to cry on. What a picture just in two terminologies of what we, the body of Christ, are designed to be. We hold each other accountable, yet at the same time we're accessible when things aren't going the way that we hoped and/or desire.

What I love here, though, is just the simple mentality. Verse 3, "That no man should be moved." In other words, the Apostle Paul is so concerned about these voices traveling through Thessalonica, he's so concerned about these ideas that are out there because he's in Athens, he's living in real time. He says, "I don't want anybody to try to convince you any way other than Jesus. Don't listen to it. May it go in one ear and out the other. And Timothy, you can trust him. He believes in the Jesus you believe in. He's got the right mentality here. He wants to encourage you. He wants to comfort you. And all he wants to do is make sure you don't fall in the gutter of life."

Now is the most important question, the "why." Why is this so important? Is it about the message? Yes. Is it about the messenger? Absolutely. Is about the mentality? Yes. But I want to ask today very strategic questions. There are three of them. It's not just about the text. It's not just about what's happening 2,000 years ago. This is about our lives right now. The articles we read, the shows we watch, the music we listen to, fill in the blank of all the information that we are subjected to on a regular basis. The message, what is the first question that we should ask is what is being communicated? In other words, just discover what is it I'm hearing, discerning the information. Do not just accept it because it's spoken, what is being said. And one of the things that you've got to do in order to gauge something or to measure something, you have to have a standard. You have to have a rule. You have to have a measuring tool by which to do so. I've got news for you, that standard is not your feelings, it's not your opinions, and it's not your preferences.

So when it comes to all this information, when we talk about what is being communicated, let me take you back to the great prophet Amos. Amos was actually in the preaching world. He was a one hit wonder, is who he was. He preached one sermon but we've been talking about it for thousands of years. Nonetheless, there in chapter 7, the Lord is doing kind of a communication bantering with Amos. He can't get the Israelites' attention. The Israelites aren't paying attention to what the Lord is saying, so here's what it does in chapter 7. He goes, "Okay, Amos, I want you to give them that illustration. No, they're not going to pay attention to that. Give them that illustration. Nah, that's not gonna... Okay, Amos, here's what I want you to do. I want you to tell them that the word of God is the plumb line for their life. It's a plumb line. It's a mechanism by which there's a weight at the bottom, a string that connects it, and you gauge, listen, whether someone or something is accurate or not in line or not or not, truth or not." I can't tell you how many times over the years of doing some type of remodeling project or building project,

whatever it may be, that I've completed it, sat back with a grin on my face, held up a plumb line to it and said, "Oops. I thought it was straight." I'll even get more contemporary. My feelings, oh, they told me it was right. Everybody that came in my house, "It looks good to me." But you put a plumb line on it and it's not straight and it's not accurate.

Ladies and gentlemen, whether it's what you read, what you hear, whatever it may be in your life, the number one most important thing you need to do in light of today's text is you need to take scripture as a plumb line and see how it measures up and you'll be shocked how much of it you can put in the garbage can because it doesn't only not match up, it competes, it is contrary to. And when he says these things here in 1 Thessalonians about what's happening and why Timothy's coming, we need to understand that first question is what is being communicated and ask ourselves, how does this line up with or against what you and I know as the scriptures of God.

Second question, it's about the messenger. Why is it being communicated? What we see here in 1 Thessalonians 3 is that Paul and Timothy – hear me clearly – they had an agenda. They had an agenda. They did not want these people overtaken by erroneous teachings. They wanted them to stay faithful and strong to the things and to the word of God. And I want you to hear something from me, this is so politically incorrect, and I just don't care: I don't care who you read or who you listen to, everybody, everybody has an agenda. They can tell you, "We report, you decide." Wrong. There's an agenda. They can tell you, "Oh, here we don't spin it." Yes, they do. In fact, we live in a world today where everybody tries to convince us, "Oh, we're just giving the facts, you decide what you want." That is so erroneous. Everybody has an agenda and, by the way, most of those people trying to sell you on that, you know what their agenda is? More revenue from commercials. Sensationalism sells. Simple, basic facts and truths, not so much.

We live in a world today where everything you hear, everything you read, there's an agenda behind it. Now I know what some of you are thinking, "Alright, Pastor, you say everybody, are you the one exception?" Nope. I've got an agenda. You've got an agenda. We all have an agenda. You say, "Well, Pastor, what is your agenda?" Well, the biblical illustration that we have in the Bible is a shepherd and sheep and a flock and I had the privilege of seeing some of that as I went into what we know as the Holy Land today. You know what I discovered about a flock of sheep? We saw it was 10 feet in front of our bus. You know what I saw about sheep? That shepherd only wanted to get that sheep or those sheep to safety and the reason that he barked and the reason that he popped that stick on the ground is he wanted to make sure they didn't end up in the wrong place. That's my agenda. I don't want you to fall for the trap of this carnal world. I don't want you to fall for the lies of the enemy. I don't want you to fall for, as one of our tour guides said this week, for all that nonsense. Don't fall for it. You know what my agenda is? We as humanity have sinned against a Holy God, and if we don't repent and ask him to save us through Jesus Christ, we're all going to hell. That's my agenda.

We all have an agenda so ask yourselves, what are they communicating, and then based on where they're coming from, why are they doing so? What's their motive? What's their

agenda? What's their "intent"? But there's a big final last question: what's the end game? At the end of the day what do they really want to see? What are they trying to have as a byproduct, so to speak? Notice the very last verse, verse 5 of this passage, "For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain." Now I want to walk through this a little bit chronologically and then we're just going to go there. The Apostle Paul was the individual who shared the gospel of Christ with those in Thessalonica. These were his spiritual children and he wanted some grandbabies. In other words, he did not want those who were passing through, he did not want the Athenians to so distract them that the message that was being shared with these early believers would either A) not be passed down to their own biological children or to those who are not yet saved. That's why at the end of his writings in 2 Timothy 2, he makes sure he says, "Those things that I have shared with you, make sure that they're given to faithful men who will pass it on to other faithful men."

There's an old statement and, boy, is it true, that Christianity, biblical Christianity is only one generation away from extinction. In other words, all that we're talking about in our culture today, all that we're seeing, all that we're living, you do understand that with every generation that comes on the scene the volume will increase and the voices will as well, and we've got to make sure that not just in our own lives but those who we care about and those who have not yet arrived on the scene, that they have a place and they have the means to hear the truth and not to fall for the wiles of the devil and the lies of the enemy.

You know, this week had the privilege of 100 plus of our faith family walking literally in some places where Jesus walked. What we know as Israel, the Holy Lands, cities that you've sung 1,000 times in Christmas songs, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Old Testament stories you've heard as a child such as Jericho and the story of David and Goliath, stories that for many who were there for the very first time, it just kind of went from black and white to color on those old TV's of days gone by. But while we were there, we took another tour. It wasn't a tour of an ancient site with rocks that were thousands of years of age. It wasn't a tour of a place where I can open the Bible and read the scripture about what happened. Went to a building, it's been built within the last 30 years. The name of it is Yad Vashem, it means a name and a memorial. It's the Holocaust Museum of Jerusalem and there you walk through beginning in the middle 30s, you walk through the people and the processes that led to six and a half million Jewish people losing their life. On the walls are quotations from those that were propagating the atrocities, those that were desiring what was taking place. I've been in this building several times. It is emotionally overwhelming, to say the least. But today, I want to share with you one of the quotations that is attributed to Adolf Hitler that drove so much of what happened. He said, "Give me the children and I'll own the future."

Off to the side of the major complex there's another memorial, smaller in size but no less emotional. It's a memorial to the children, 1.5 million of them, because do you know what Hitler recognized? "If I take out the grandparents and the parents, these kids have grown up hearing. I gotta get everybody." What does it say here in verse 5? He says, "For

this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain." In light of all that we've talked about today, in light of all the communication that we're subjected to, in light of all the information that is out there, it doesn't matter what your background is, it doesn't matter what your stage of life is, it doesn't matter what your expertise is, I can promise you biblically based on this text that whatever information that you personally have been subjected to that is contrary to scripture, your kids, your grandkids, and your great grandkids will hear more of it. And it is important today for us to understand that the enemy, Satan, is a liar and he doesn't just want to take you out, he wants to take out your kids, he wants to take out your grandkids, and he is trying to build a culture where scripture is not available and the name of Jesus cannot be spoken. I can't change what they "do out there," but I can change what happens in my home. I can't change what laws and rules and regulations are determined but I can determine what comes out of my mouth and what is communicated out of my life.

And so when we talk about who should we listen to, can I conclude with this? Who do your kids listen to? Who are your grandkids listening to? Because back when you were a child, many of those communications were innocent and fun but nowadays there's a very clear agenda, they want the proverbial day to take and do what Satan does, steal, kill and destroy. He says don't let it happen.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Today, as we come to this time of decision rather than being one of the faith that according to scripture is being called to be a protector therein, maybe today you realize you're that person who's believed the lies. Maybe today you realize you're that person who fell for the fallacies. You thought things were based on everything contrary, or, but the gospel of Jesus Christ, and maybe today, the Spirit of God took the word of God and pierced your heart sharper than a two edged sword and you realized your sinful state and condition and how desperately you need Jesus Christ. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. You know, that passage is precluded by saying that if we believe in our heart and we confess the Lord Jesus, we shall be saved. Maybe today is that day that you believe and that you confess. In just a moment, I'm gonna ask you to call in the name of the Lord. Doesn't mean you have to say what I would have you say. It's not about repeating a certain amount of words in the right order. This is your heart's cry. This is that acknowledgment that I have a sin condition that only Jesus can fix. That is that being willing to say I cannot do it on my own. I desperately need Jesus.

If you're that person today, they can I encourage you just to cry out to God. It might sound something similar to this, but use your own words. "God, today I recognize I'm guilty as charged. Your Bible says that all have sinned and I have. I've gone contrary to your word. I've gone contrary to your will. I've gone contrary to your way. God, I've ended up in places I never thought I would, doing things I never dreamed of, and I realize the position I'm in. Your word says the result or the wages of my sin is death and, God, I not only believe it, I own it. I deserve it. But it also says not only is the wage of my sin death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So God, today in spite of my sinful state, I want you to know I believe. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me



so much that he came on my behalf, lived a sinless life on my behalf, allowed himself to be nailed to his cross where, God, I believe he paid the price and the punishment for my sin against you. God, today I believe that when he rose from the grave victoriously three days later, Jesus Christ made it possible for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers not just to the problems that we discussed in the last 30 minutes, but the problems of this old world. I don't have the solutions but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer and the only solution to my sin problem. So the best way I know how I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With their heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe today you're that one who cried out to God. In just a moment I'm gonna pray for us. We're gonna stand and sing. I just want to invite you just to step out and step forward. We have a whole team of folks, they just want to hear your story. They just want to encourage you. They want to comfort you and they want to pray with and for you. Maybe today you say, "Well, Pastor, already got that covered." Maybe today when you take that plumb line of scripture out It's about following in believer's baptism, or maybe the Lord's made it clear this is the local body of believers you're supposed to identify with, or maybe you just need to be prayed with or prayed for, or maybe today you say, you know, it's not about stepping out and stepping forward but in a moment you're going to step out and maybe the question you need to ask yourself is how is what I'm embracing lining up with the plumb line of scripture. And the voices that sometimes I give way too much attention to, how do they compare to the plumb line of scripture.

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, thank you. Thank you that in spite much like the illustration of sheep that we go wayward at times, that according to Isaiah 59, your arm of mercy and grace is longer than our transgression. Lord, you have spoken, we just simply need to respond. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*