



1 Thessalonians

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...who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, 1 Thessalonians 2:15

Paul continues his thought of the previous verse which spoke of the persecution that the Thessalonians faced. They suffered from their own countrymen just as the church in Judea suffered at the hand of the Jews there. Expanding on that now, he says (of the Jews) that it was they “who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets.”

Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews, and an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin, now identified more with the believing Gentiles in Thessalonica than he did with his own countrymen according to the flesh. And this is even more poignant because he was once one of those who “killed the Lord Jesus.” He had rejected Christ, just as did most of his countrymen. Though he didn't literally kill Jesus, he was a part of the group of people who did. It was they who also killed “their own prophets.”

These words ring back to the words of Jesus Himself when He spoke against the leaders of Israel in Matthew 23 –

²⁹“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ ³¹ “Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ *guilt*. ³³ Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? ³⁴ Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: *some* of them you will kill and crucify, and *some* of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, ³⁵ that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you

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murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶ Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. -Matthew 23:29-36

After stating that the Jews had killed both Jesus and their own prophets, he then says that they “have persecuted us.” This literally says, “and have driven us out.” As noted in the previous verse, it was the Jews who normally incited the original persecution against Paul and those with him as they spoke to the Gentile believers. They would stir the Gentiles up and speak against the gospel, causing the Gentiles to then take matters into their own hands. It is a repeated pattern in Acts which shows the great enmity between the Jewish people and this newly established faith in Christ Jesus, the One who had fulfilled and thus nullified their law. They could not accept such a thing was possible, and they riled against the very notion of it in every way possible. The Thessalonians were fully aware of the truth of this statement because it happened to Paul there as well. He and Silas were literally driven out of the area by the Jews.

But, in rejecting the message of Christ, which says that the law is fulfilled and annulled in Him, they became a group of people who “do not please God.” It is impossible to be saved through the Law of Moses. It was given as a temporary system to lead all people to an understanding of their need for Christ Jesus. In rejecting Christ, they could not be pleasing to God, because Christ – not the law – is God’s complete and final means of salvation for mankind; Jew and Gentile alike. Thus, they are “contrary to all men.”

They are contrary to believers in Christ because they have not come to accept that Christ is the fulfillment of their law. Instead, they speak against the Christian faith. Any Jew who comes to faith in Christ is shunned, and is often even excommunicated from family and friends. They are contrary to all others because they feel that their law (which is actually annulled in Christ) sets them apart from all others. They feel that because of the Law of Moses, their sign of circumcision, and their adherence to the Sabbath, that they are righteous before God while all others are unrighteous. Thus, they are “contrary to all men.”

Life application: Pray for the eyes of all unbelievers to be opened to the truth of Christ. And pray for the Jewish people, collectively and individually, to see their need for the Messiah and call out to Him for salvation.

... forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.* 1 Thessalonians 2:16

In the previous verse, Paul put a heavy blame on the Jews who “killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets.” He then said that they continued on by persecuting His apostles. In their actions, they did “not please God” and they were “contrary to all men.” One can see the

bitterness he felt at their attitude towards God's revelation of Himself throughout their history and even to the present time in which he was living.

He now further explains their conduct towards the apostles, and what that means, by saying that they (meaning the Jews) were "forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles." As noted in previous verses, this is specifically highlighted, time and time again, in the book of Acts. The Jews doggedly pursued Paul and those with him. They came between them and the Gentiles, stirring up arguments and fomenting every kind of trouble possible for them.

However, the message of the apostles to the Gentiles was so "that they may be saved." These words are speaking of the inclusion of Gentiles in the plan of salvation. In other words, the Jews not only didn't want the saving message spoken to the Gentiles, they didn't even want the Gentiles to know that they could be saved.

This is certainly at the heart of why the Jews riled against the message. They so disdained the thought of the Gentiles being saved by God's grace, that they were willing to do almost anything in order for the message to be stopped. It meant that there was an ending of their law, and a new dispensation of grace and mercy apart from that law – for any who simply believed by faith; Jew or Gentile. The very notion of it seemed incredible, and thus impossible to tolerate.

But Paul continues by saying that the striving of the Jews only brought trouble upon themselves. The result was "always to fill up *the measure of* their sins." The words here need to be understood properly. They literally mean "unto the filling up." There is a certain amount of sin that the Jews could expect to be dismissed by God through His grace and mercy, but there is a point in which that amount would be filled up, and beyond which only destruction could be the result. This same concept is true with any given nation, church, or person. There is a point where sin finally fills up to its measure, and then only wrath can be the inevitable result. This is what Paul is saying concerning his people of national heritage. They had filled up the measure of their sins, and he knew, as he says, "that wrath has come upon them to the uttermost."

Paul knew that the time had come, that Israel had rejected Christ, and that there was no remedy left for them as a nation. The cup was full, the wrath had been ordained, and it was only a matter of time before the wine would be poured out. This would be realized at the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the nation to the four corners of heaven.

Life application: The Law of Moses told the nation of Israel what they could expect as they heaped up sins against God. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 give exacting details of what the

Lord would do to them. These things were fulfilled once in the Babylonian exile, and the second time in the Roman dispersion. However, God promised restoration for Israel after their time of punishment. It doesn't matter if they deserve it or not. What matters is what God has promised. How terrible that Christians ignore the decision of God because of their hatred of the Jews. God has spoken, God has performed, and so we simply need to accept what He has done and watch as history unfolds marvelously before our eyes.

But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. 1 Thessalonians 2:17

Paul has been speaking of the Jews who had been opposed to the gospel message, and who had done their best to keep him and those with him from sharing it with the Gentiles. After his thoughts about them, he now says, "But we." The words are set in contrast to what he said about them. Instead of fighting against getting the message to the Gentiles, their longing was not only to share it with them, but to continue fellowshiping with them. He deemed them as brothers, united in Christ, not as "Gentile sinners" who were unworthy of being fellowshiped with.

He then continues on with the word "brethren." It is his way of identifying himself with them, personally. He has actually set a partition up between himself and the unbelieving Jews, and he has united himself, and his associates, with these Gentiles. The bond with them is stronger than his previous bond to his people of national origin. As brethren, he says they have "been taken away from you for a short time in presence." Here he chooses a word, *aporphanizó*, which is found nowhere else in Scripture. It literally means "bereaved." It is as if they had left the Thessalonians defenseless as orphans. This then is a return to the parent metaphors of verses 7 & 11.

In this state, he then uses a strong term to define the time of their separation. The words "for a short time" are literally, "for time of an hour." It is his way of defining the time of separation exactly, as if they counted the minutes that they had been separated, just as parents would when separated from their children. There was a longing to return and see their beloved face to face.

However, he then notes that this bereavement was "not in heart." Though they were separated because of the enmity of the Jews, the hearts of Paul and his associates remained united with their beloved brethren in Thessalonica. Because of this heartfelt and brotherly bond, he says that they "endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire."

The time of their separation didn't result in. "Out of sight; out of mind." Instead it resulted in, "Distance makes the heart grow fonder." Their hearts were truly longing to return to Thessalonica and be united in personal fellowship once again.

Life application: If you are a part of a church which has missionaries being supported by you, remember them in your prayers, and also remember them with a blessing in the mail once in a while. They are certainly lonely at times, frustrated often, and desiring to reunite with those they love. And yet, they continue on because they have a duty which is more important than any other. Be mindful of them, and be sure that they know they are appreciated.

Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.
1 Thessalonians 2:18

The verse begins with "Therefore." It is based on Paul's sentiment that he, and those with him, greatly wanted to see the faces of those in Thessalonica. The words, "we wanted to come to you," are in more than just a conditional tense. Instead, it was their full intention to come, and they had meant to do so.

Paul then places a stress on the thought by saying, "even I, Paul, time and again." The use of his name here in no way implies that the others were less intent. Rather, as the author of the letter, he is showing the intensity he felt. That is then transferred to the others in what is known as an epistolary plural. It is where one speaks for all, just as he did at his introductory comments in verse 1:2. In this case, the singular "I," speaks for the whole.

His further stress, "time and again," shows that it wasn't just one attempt to return and then the attempts ended, but that they had made a real and concerted effort to make it back to their beloved brethren.

However, despite their attempts to return, "Satan hindered us." He doesn't elaborate on what this means, and so only speculation can be made. However, for the Thessalonians, he simply leaves the reason with these words alone. Satan is a word which any Jew among them could explain the meaning of, but it is a word which does not necessarily mean the devil himself. It could simply be a written personification of that which is opposed to God.

Paul does elsewhere speak of personal, fallen, spirits that hinder believers in their actions, and who pull them away from their faith in Christ. But that does not necessarily mean that he is referring to Satan in this way now. In the Old Testament, from which Paul draws his theology, the term "Satan" is used when speaking of a man on several occasions. It also speaks of an actual entity, especially in the book of Job. Therefore, as Vincent's Word Studies notes, "It is

clear that Paul here as elsewhere employs the word in a personal sense; but any attempt to base the doctrine of a personal devil on this and similar passages is unsafe.”

This does not mean Vincent is arguing against a personal devil, but he is arguing for the term to possibly be applied in a broader sense of that which is opposed to God. It can simply be wicked people who are hostile to the spreading of the Gospel. And this is exactly what Paul referred to in earlier verses of this very chapter.

Life application: There is a whole world full of enmity to the message of the Gospel. People will do pretty much anything to stop its spread. And yet, in that persecution, the message spreads even faster. The deaths of the saints is tragic, but their eternal life will infinitely overshadow their temporal loss. Be strong if you are facing persecution. Good times lay ahead!