

Today we'll finish up 2:1-16, which describes the apostolic team's gospel ministry in Thessalonica.

Here's how we can outline it & take a birds-eye view of these vv.

➤ As we'll see in vs 13, thanked God for the Thessalonian's positive responses to the gospel.

▷ I.e., they accepted the gospel as what it really is, i.e., the word of God.

➤ In vs 14, adds wd of encouragement.

▷ I.e., not alone.

➤ Finally, in vv 15-16, Paul inserts an editorial comment regarding opposition to the gospel.

In vs 13, Paul gives thanks for the Thessalonian's positive response to the gospel.

1st they accepted the gospel as what it really is, i.e., the word of God, 13.

➤ When you received the word of God [context: gospel message], 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.

Recognized the divine source of the gospel. ☞ Not human message.

➤ I don't think we can stress this enough. 1/9

➤ Paul puts it clearly in *Gal. 1:11-12*.

▷ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

➤ The gospel finds its source in God, it is totally trustworthy and it's the only valid plan of salvation.

▷ There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

In vs 14, adds wd of encouragement.

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.

"Imitators."

➤ Idea of the Grk term here is not so much imitation as comparison.

➤ Paul does not mean to imply that the Thessalonians set out to imitate these other believers.

➤ The imitation is of the order that "your experience resembles theirs."

➤ The same things happened to you that happened to the churches of God in Judea, to the people there who belong to Christ Jesus. You suffered the same persecutions from your own people that they suffered from the Jews.

➤ They had become imitators of the original Jewish churches in Judea in how they had been persecuted. 2/9

So what's the point of comparison?

➤ What is the word of encouragement to believers?

➤ Here it is.

▷ My . . . , we are not alone in persecution.

In the context of Satanic-inspired persecution, Peter writes this, in 1 Pet. 5:8-10 (CSB).

➤ (CSB) Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.

We can ask, what effect do Peter & Paul want to have on us here?

➤ Well, I would suggest that, from the fact that we're not alone in this, the apostles want us to draw encouragement, strength, and courage to persevere.

▷ They want us to understand that when we are persecuted it is not at all unique to us or at all unusual.

➤ Don't be surprised at the fiery trials we are going through, as if something strange were happening to us.

➤ Persecution to some degree or another is to be expected wherever believers take seriously their commitment to God and take seriously the gospel of Jesus Christ.

➤ Until Jesus returns, the battle between good and evil will persist, and suffering for our faith in Christ will be the norm for all Christians all over the world. 3/9

➤ Every believer shares in this experience to one degree or another and is not alone in this.

▷ And Peter & Paul want us to draw encouragement, strength, and courage from this truth, to help us endure when persecution is stirred up against us.

Finally, in vv 15-16, Paul inserts an editorial comment regarding opposition to the gospel.

Idea: Paul is strongly denouncing any & all those who oppose the gospel.

▷ The Greek word for Jews can refer, & most likely does here, to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, who opposed the Christian faith in that time.

Paul 1st notes the violent manifestation that opposition to the gospel can take, vs 15a.

For some of the Jews and their followers killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out.

➤ The reference is specifically to the expulsion of Paul and his friends from Thessalonica.

➤ This shows us how much the gospel is hated by the world, unsaved humanity, & the spiritual forces of evil.

▷ Our enemies hate the gospel, Jesus, & us.

▷ Jn. 3:19-20, This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 4/9

➤ We live in a hostile environment.

▷ Jn. 16:33b (CSB), You will have suffering in this world.

➤ Suffering means both trials & persecutions.

▷ Jn. 16:33c (CSB), Be courageous! I have conquered the world.

➤ Conquered is the term John uses in Revelation for conquering evil and pictures Jesus as the Divine Warrior defeating the forces of evil.

▷ At the cross Christ was victorious over the prince of this world.

➤ Satan and his fallen angels are a defeated foe.

➤ The war is settled for eternity, but the battles continue.

➤ Satan and the world of darkness are filled with rage because he knows his time is short.

➤ In the midst of our personal battles, we must take heart and be aware of 2 things.

→ 1st, that in Christ we are more than conquerors,

→ & 2nd, that nothing can separate us from God's love.

Ok, we are looking @ Paul's editorial comment regarding opposition to the gospel.

Paul 1st noted the violent manifestation that opposition to the gospel can take, 15a. 5/9

Next, in vv 15b-16a (NIV), Paul evaluates this opposition.

^{15b} They displease God and are hostile to everyone ^{16a} 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.

Paul makes 3 points in his evaluation, summarize.

➤ 1st, opponents of the gospel are displeasing to God.

➤ 2nd, opponents of the gospel are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved.

➤ And 3rd, by opposing God's servants and rejecting the gospel, Paul says the opponents of the gospel always heap up their sins to the limit.

➤ Details.

1st point of evaluation.

➤ Opponents of the gospel are displeasing to God.

➤ This makes sense, since it is God's desire that all people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

➤ But notice something significant here.

▷ Paul does not mention that this is displeasing to us, the persecuted, although it should be displeasing to us.

▷ He's emphasizing that those who persecute believers are antagonizing God. 6/9

▷ Paul learned that.

▷ Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

▷ Those who set themselves against God's people & his gospel also set themselves against God.

▷ Acts 5:38-39, Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.

2nd point of evaluation of opposition to the gospel.

▷ Opponents of the gospel are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved.

▷ It is in all humanity's interest to hear the gospel that offers salvation.

▷ To stand in the way of the gospel is therefore to be hostile to everyone.

▷ An unbeliever who is willing to live and let live with respect to personal convictions regarding God is less dangerous than the following person.

▷ I.e., the one who not only disbelieves himself but also tries to keep others from hearing the gospel.

▷ Jesus has a warning for people like this.

▷ Lk 11:52, Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering. 7/9

And the 3rd point of evaluation of opposition to the gospel.

➤ By opposing God's servants and rejecting the gospel, Paul says the opponents of the gospel always heap up their sins to the limit.

▷ Let's put this in familiar terms.

▷ Paul is saying the following regarding our enemies' continual opposition to the gospel.

➤ In their continual opposition to the gospel, they are giving themselves enough rope to hang themselves with.

➤ The key concept at work here is that there exists a fixed amount of sins to be committed, after which punishment will be meted out.

▷ The vb for heap up suggests the picture of a vessel or cup that is in a slow but constant process of being filled up.

▷ Once it is completely full, judgment will take place.

▷ Paul's words imply that there is a certain measure of wickedness that God will allow a nation, a group, or an individual to complete before His judgment falls on them.

➤ Gen. 15:12-16.

➤ Unbelievers getting away w/ nothing.

▷ Asaph.

▷ Ps. 50:21, These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you. 8/9

Then Paul notes the fatal outcome for the opponents of the gospel, vs 16b.

The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

➤ Once the measure of sins filled up, God's wrath overtakes them. 9/9