

HARD QUESTIONS FOR HARD TIMES

1 Thessalonians 1-4

"Hard" questions of life– Young people ask:

- Where should I go to school? What should I major in?
- What will I do with my life?
- How can I know God's will for my life?
- Who will I marry?
- Where will I live?
- What kind of car will I drive?
- Lord, please don't come yet! Give me a chance to live a little first!
- What are we living for?
- What's really important in my life?

While the believers at Thessalonica aren't asking the same questions, they're asking similar questions concerning their future.

One of 1st churches in Macedonia, started on 2nd journey. Acts 16-17

Ministry's fruitful. There's a positive response. 1 Thess. 1:3-10

Founded in heavy Jewish opposition and persecution, which continues after Paul's departure and provokes major problem.

Testimony of their changed lives results in persecution. 1:3

Result of their suffering

They feel alone and discouraged.

They think Paul hasn't come because he doesn't care about them.

Paul's concern for them

He tried to visit them but wasn't able to go 2:17-18

Satan thwarted him 2:18

Finally he sent Timothy to encourage them 3:1-5

Timothy's report

Church is growing.

They're still discouraged.

They're still questioning why Paul hasn't come.

PURPOSE AND THEME Message corresponds to 3 main purposes:

1. Defend himself concerning their doubts about him.

> Result desired: That they might trust Paul and his love for them.

> Message: He's sincerely interested and wants to visit personally but hasn't been able to. He wants them to keep growing.

2. Stimulate us to be faithful; not discouraged due to affliction.

> Result desired: Faithfulness and joy in affliction.

> Message: Live a holy and blameless life; be joyful in suffering.

3. Answer question about people who die before Lord's return.

> Result desired: Knowledge concerning rapture and Day of the Lord.

> Message: Dead in Christ will be raised together with the living.

God will save us all together from the wrath of the Day of the Lord.

ORGANIZATION 4 main sections:

1. Encouragement, assuring them of concern for them in their affliction 1-3

2. Exhortation to live a holy and blameless life. 4:1-12

3. Instruction concerning those who've died and Day of the Lord. 4:13-5:11

4. Specific commands we should follow 5:12-28

RELATION WITH THE THESSALONIANS 1-3

Paul responds to their doubts about his interest in them.

GREETING 1:1 *"Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you."*

THANKSGIVING FOR THEIR RESPONSE TO GOSPEL 1:2-10

Reminds them of their initial response when he first visits them.

His thanksgiving 1:2

"We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers."

Their response to the Gospel 1:3 *"We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."*

He's thankful: when gospel's preached, they accept it.

Evidence of their election 1:4-10 *"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."*

Their changed lives are testimony to effect of gospel.

Everyone's talking about it.

They turn from pagan idolatry to worship and serve the One True God and to wait for the return of His Son.

Power of the Spirit 1:4-5a

Their conviction 1:5b

Their imitation of Paul 1:6

Their model testimony 1:7-10

Conversion from idols to God

Service to God

Expectation of Jesus' return

EVIDENCE OF PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THEM 2:1-12

Reminds them of attitude he demonstrated in **initial visit**.

His pure motives 2:1-6

He shows his pure motives in his concern for them then.

Faithful in spite of suffering 2:1-2

"You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. 2 We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition."

**When preaching means suffering,
he doesn't escape from it.**

If he were afraid of persecution,

he'd never have begun his ministry among them.

Desire for divine approval 2:3-4 *"For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts."*

His concern is for God's approval, not man's.

Lack of flattery or self-exaltation 2:5-6 *"You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. 6 We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else."*

He's sincere, never using flattery, nor seeking praise.

His pure methods 2:7-9

In his methods before them he was also blameless.

Demonstration of love 2:6b-7

"As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children."

He showed them a gentle display of love and concern.

Sacrificial service 2:8-9

"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 9 Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you."

His ministry was marked by selfless, sacrificial service.

His pure life 2:10-12

"You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 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."

He's careful to observe spotless Christian conduct.

Like a mother, he showed gentle love. 2:7

**Like a father, he showed concern 2:11
to guide them in path worthy of God.**

THEIR RESPONSE TO PAUL'S MINISTRY 2:13-16

They were convinced by his conduct and attitude;

They accepted his message and followed example of church in Judea, of Christ, the prophets, and of Paul himself,
in suffering for the gospel's sake.

Accepted his message 2:13

"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."

Imitated those who suffered 2:14-16 *"For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen 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 all men 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."*

ANSWER TO THEIR QUESTION ABOUT PAUL'S ABSENCE 2:17-20

After reminding them of evidence of his concern for them, Paul explains reason he hasn't been able to visit them.

He wanted to come and tried, but was prevented by Satan.

Although he hasn't been able to go, he does care about them
and is glad for their progress.

Desire to go 2:17

"But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you."

Attempt to go 2:18a

"For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again"

Prevention by Satan **2:18b** *"—but Satan stopped us."*

Continuing concern **2:19-20** *"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."*

So we genuinely care about you!

TEMPORARY SOLUTION BY TIMOTHY'S VISIT 3:1-10

"So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. 2 We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, 3 so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. 4 In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. 5 For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless."

6 But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. 7 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. 8 For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. 9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith."

While he knows they will not be satisfied with a substitute,

Paul sends Timothy in his place

His visit provides *temporary* solution for their problem.

Paul is encouraged by positive report Timothy brought back.

INTEREST DEMONSTRATED BY PRAYER FOR THEM 3:11-13

He continues to pray that God will enable him to go to them and that they will continue to develop in love and faithfulness.

That he could go 3:11 "Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you."

That they would grow 3:12 "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you."

That they would be strengthened 3:13 "May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

EXHORTATION TO ABOUND IN HOLY CONDUCT 4:1-12

2nd major theme is an exhortation to holy conduct.

MORAL CONCERNS 4:1-8 "Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit."

In spite of fornication common in their city,

God wants our lives to be different.

Paul exhorts us to maintain moral purity.

Power God wants to control our desires is available to us through the Holy Spirit.

God Who gave us the Spirit is holy; He wants us to be holy also.

FRATERNAL CONCERNS 4:9-12

“Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”

Not only is God concerned about our moral conduct, He is also concerned about our relationships with one another.

God is love;

He wants His children to love one another also.

Thessalonians have shown love for one another.

God wants our love to continue to grow.

Specific evidence of our love includes helping people who are suffering near us.

We will not be interfering in the affairs of others.

Instead, we'll keep busy working

so we have a good testimony before people around us.

LESSONS FOR US TODAY: