

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Paul's Love for His Embattled Brethren

Introduction

- A. Text: **1 Thess. 3:6-10**.
- B. Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia.
 - 1. It was an important seaport.
 - 2. It also lay on the great ancient trade route known as the *Via Egnatia*, the Egnatian Way.
- C. Paul's two letters to the church in Thessalonica were among his earliest — with 1 Thessalonians being written about AD 51 and 2 Thessalonians shortly thereafter.
- D. These two letters from Paul are perhaps the earliest of all the books in the New Testament.
- E. Paul's first visit to Thessalonica had been on his second missionary journey.
 - 1. He had come there from Philippi where he and Silas had been imprisoned for preaching Christ - **Ac. 16:6-40**.
 - 2. For three consecutive Sabbaths in Thessalonica, he had reasoned from the Scriptures with the Jews in the synagogue, and a number of people obeyed the gospel, not only from among Jews but also many Gentiles - **Ac. 17:1-4**.
 - 3. Unbelieving Jews, however, stirred up a mob against Paul and his companions, threatening even residents of the city who had extended hospitality to them - **Ac. 17:5-9**.
 - 4. The saints then sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, where they were followed by the unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica - **Ac. 17:10-13**.
 - 5. Paul was no doubt reluctant to leave a group of new Christians in a situation as difficult as Thessalonica — he would have had grave concerns for his embattled brethren.
 - 6. So when Paul had made his way down to Athens and was distraught with concern for the saints in Thessalonica, Timothy was sent back to find out how the church was doing and to strengthen them in the faith - **Ac. 17:14,15; 1 Thess. 3:1,2,6,7**.
 - 7. By the time Timothy returned, Paul had reached Corinth - **Ac. 18:5**. Timothy's eagerly awaited report was mostly positive, and so Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians expressing his joy and appreciation — also including some teaching on points they were having trouble with.
 - 8. 2 Thessalonians was written some time after the first letter to clarify and reemphasize Paul's teaching on the points the Thessalonians were confused about.
- F. So the Thessalonian letters were written:
 - 1. *To reaffirm Paul's love* for the saints there.
 - 2. *To deal with specific problems* that were threatening the new church.
- G. *Four basic points* stand out in these letters — no less important to Christians today than they were to Paul's friends in southeastern Europe two thousand years ago.

I. PERSONAL CONCERN FOR FELLOW CHRISTIANS, ESPECIALLY THOSE YOUNG IN THE FAITH

- A. 1 & 2 Thessalonians are very *affectionate* letters.
- B. Paul would have been concerned that his hasty departure from Thessalonica might be taken as evidence that he didn't really care about them — in other words, that he had left town to save his own neck and

left them to fend for themselves.

- C. He wrote to emphasize his tender love for them, and the language of personal concern in 1 & 2 Thessalonians is some of the most affectionate in the New Testament - **1 Thess. 2:11-3:10**.
- D. How desperately today we need to think and feel as Paul did toward his brothers and sisters — especially toward those who are young in the faith and face serious obstacles to their growth.

II. RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARD OPPOSITION TO THE GOSPEL

- A. Persecution against Paul and the new converts had broken out almost immediately in Thessalonica. Having had to leave them so quickly, Paul was concerned whether the new Christians in Thessalonica would hold out against their enemies.
- B. In writing to encourage them, Paul reminded them that from the first he had told them what was going to happen. Persecution was not a thing they should have been surprised about - **1 Thess. 3:1-4**. Cf. **1 Pt. 4:12**.
- C. Paul knew that the church in Thessalonica could not be shielded from persecution, but he wanted them to *respond rightly* to it.
- D. Some wrong reactions would have been:
 - 1. Being naive, unconcerned, flippant.
 - 2. Anger, hostility, returning evil for evil.
 - 3. Fear, cowardice - **Jn. 16:33**.
- E. Over the long haul, it is not easy to think rightly about our adversaries, but we must learn to do so.

III. WISE CONDUCT TOWARD DISORDERLY BROTHERS AND SISTERS

- A. Just as a church's existence can be threatened from without by persecution, its health can be threatened from within by the *disorderly conduct of its own members*.
- B. Paul taught not only what corrections needed to be made by the disorderly, he taught what the church should do if these members failed to make the necessary corrections - **2 Thess. 3:6-13**.
- C. One of the greatest challenges that we face, both as congregations and as individuals, is to deal rightly with the weak and the wayward.
- D. Three great qualities are needed:
 - 1. *Knowledge* of the principles of scriptural truth.
 - 2. *Wisdom* to apply the principles of truth in the most effective way - **1 Thess. 5:14**.
 - 3. *Courage* to do what knowledge and wisdom indicate.

IV. TRUTHFUL, BALANCED THINKING ABOUT "LAST THINGS"

- A. The Bible doctrine of "eschatology" is its teaching concerning "end things" or "last things" — either at the end of an individual's life in this world or at the end of the world altogether.
- B. One of the problems that Paul was concerned about in Thessalonica was that some were struggling with confused notions on this subject. He wrote to clear up these misunderstandings.
 - 1. The fate of Christians who die before the Lord returns - **1 Thess. 4:13-18**.

2. The time of the day of the Lord - **1 Thess. 5:1-3**.
 3. The proper way for Christians to live while awaiting the Lord's return - **1 Thess. 5:4-11**.
 4. The possibility that the day of the Lord had already come - **2 Thess. 2:1-12**.
- C. Not only is much *falsehood* taught about last things, but some also have a tendency to become *imbalanced*, becoming obsessed with this subject to the neglect of many other Bible truths.
- D. Paul's teaching concerning end things was meant not for idle speculation or doctrinal debate but for *encouragement* - **1 Thess. 4:18**.

Conclusion

- A. On all four of these points, we are benefited when we hear what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians.
1. Personal concern for fellow Christians, especially those young in the faith.
 2. Right attitude toward opposition to the gospel.
 3. Wise conduct toward disorderly brothers and sisters.
 4. Truthful, balanced thinking about "last things."
- B. It makes a great difference when *difficulties* and *confusions* can be dealt with in an atmosphere of *genuine brotherly love!*