

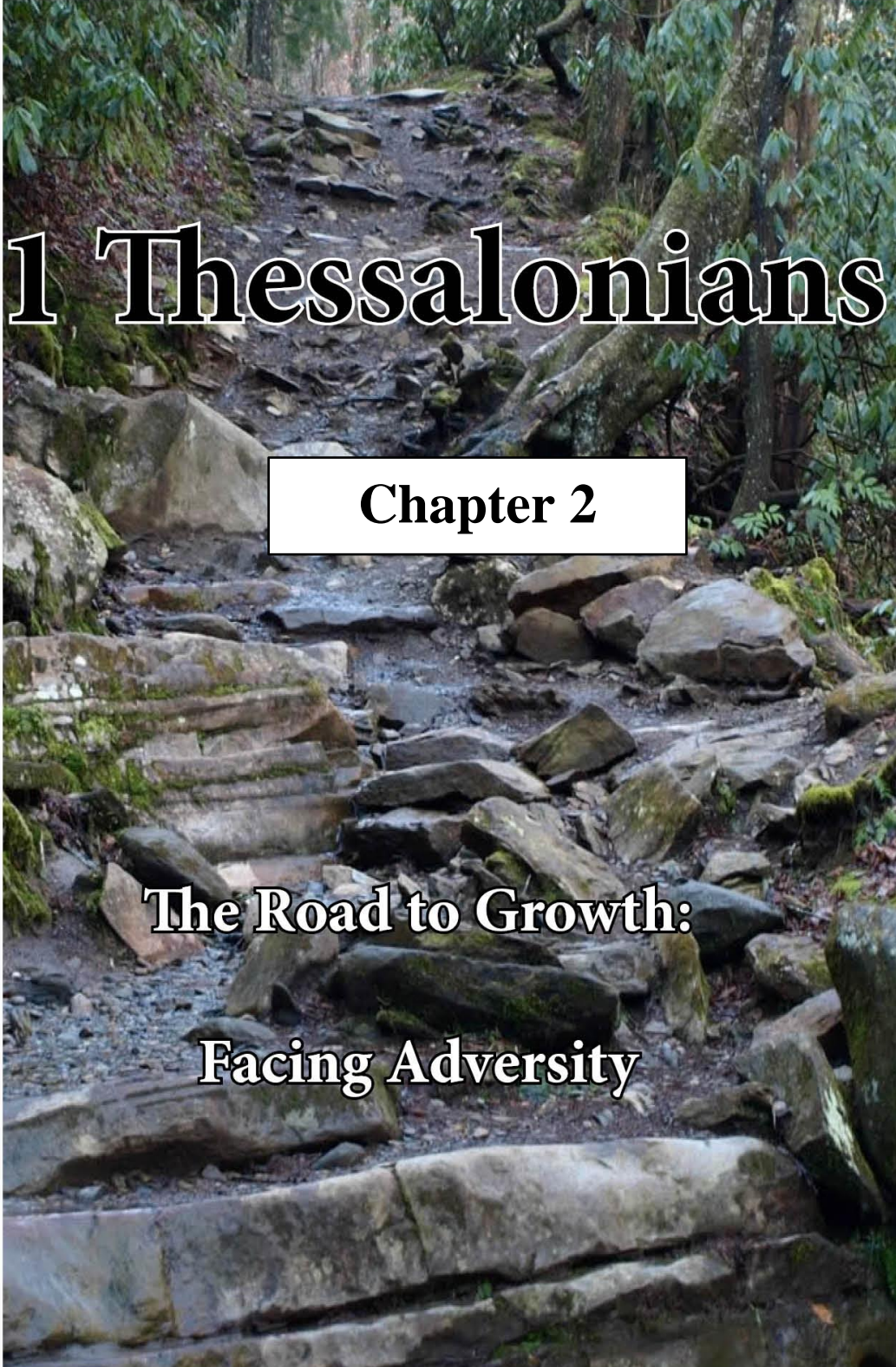
Journeys With God

1 Thessalonians

Chapter 2

The Road to Growth:

Facing Adversity



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

1 Thessalonians 2:1 - Opposition Will Come

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.

Truth to Learn

An effective Christian ministry will encounter opposition.

Behind the Words

“**Know**” is translated from the Greek verb *eidō*, which literally means “to see,” but as in English, it carries the meaning of “to see with perception.” Hence, it means “to know.” It is expressed in the perfect tense (past completed action with an ongoing effect, where the emphasis is on the effect) as a second person plural (you) verb. Since the verb already expresses the idea of “you (plural) know”, it is not necessary to include the pronoun *autoi* (you, plural) in order to convey that meaning. However, the fact that Paul used the personal pronoun indicates emphasis on it and it is here translated as “yourselves.”

The word “**coming**” is from the Greek noun *eisodon*, which we saw in verse nine of chapter one. It is made up of *eis*, meaning “in” or “into” and *hodos*, meaning “a road” or “a way.” Thus, *eisodon* literally means “a way in.” So, we could have translated this as “... that our way in to you ...”

“**In vain**” is the translation of *kenos*, which literally means “empty,” “hollow,” or “fruitless.” In this case it could be a reference to Paul’s preaching being without merit or deceitful, or it could be a reference to a lack of success. Based on the subject matter of the latter half of the previous chapter it probably refers to “a lack of success.”

The verb “**was**” is translated from *ginomai*, which means “to begin to be” or “to come into existence.” It is expressed here in the perfect tense which indicates past completed action with an ongoing effect, the emphasis being on the effect. We could, therefore, interpret the ending of this verse as “that our coming to you has shown itself to be fruitful.”

Meaning Explained

Having spent most of the first part of this letter praising the Thessalonian Christians for their testimony, Paul now turns to a more serious topic. Based on the subject matter of this second chapter we can surmise that there were some people who had made charges against the way that Paul and his associates behaved. From verse three we can conclude that their accusers had claimed that Paul used deceitful means or false, flattering words in his preaching. From verses five and six it also appears that Paul was accused of trying to take advantage of the Thessalonians for his own selfish benefit. Also, from verses seventeen through twenty, it appears that Paul and his companions were accused of hastily abandoning the Church in Thessalonica after they got what they wanted from them.

So, to get a better understanding of the background of Paul’s ministry to these dear saints, read **Acts 16:9-17:10**. There you will see that Paul and Silas (Silvanus) were persecuted and thrown in jail while ministering in Philippi. The reason they had been imprisoned was not because they preached the Gospel, but because they cast out a demon from a young girl who was being selfishly used by others to make money from her demon possession and resulting fortune telling. After leaving Philippi and coming to Thessalonica, Paul preached in the synagogue and a large number of people believed. But, because of the jealousy of the Jews there, he was forced to leave

and go to Berea. The Jews in Thessalonica then pursued Paul and his companions, again stirring up the crowds against them, causing Paul and Silvanus to flee from Berea as well.

In today's verse Paul is pointing out to the Thessalonian Christians that his ministry there was not without merit or fruit. In fact, in **Acts 17:4** we see that some of the Jews and a large number of Greeks got saved as a result of Paul's ministry.

Application

Paul and Silvanus didn't let opposition and persecution stop them from serving God in the ministry He had called them to. Likewise, don't let opposition to your ministry cause you to get discouraged or to give up. Remember, greater is He who is in us than he who is against us!

1 Thessalonians 2:2 - God-Given Courage

But also, we had suffered previously and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much opposition.

Truth to Learn

Serving God faithfully means you will encounter opposition.

Behind the Words

The words “we had suffered previously” are translated from the Greek verb *propaschō*, which is made up of *pro*, meaning “before, in time or position” and *paschō*, meaning “to suffer.” So, we can see that *propaschō* means “to have suffered previously.” It is expressed as an aorist participle, so it could be translated as “having suffered previously.”

“Were spitefully treated” is from the verb *hubridzō*, based on the noun *hubris*, meaning “an insult” or “arrogance.” *Hubridzō* means “to act with great violence” or “to treat with contempt, causing injury.” This is also expressed as an aorist participle, so it could be translated as “having been treated injuriously.”

The words “we were bold ... to speak” are translated from the Greek verb *parrēsiadzomai*. This word means “to speak openly, boldly, and without restraint.”

“Opposition” is from *agon*, which refers to “contention,” “opposition,” or “striving for victory or mastery.” It is a picture of a contestant trying hard to win a victory in an athletic event in spite of strong opposition.

Meaning Explained

As we discussed in the previous verse, Paul and his companions faced a lot of opposition to their ministry in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. He tells us now that they suffered as a result of their work and they were treated with acts of violence by those who opposed them in Philippi.

In spite of the fierce opposition they faced, however, Paul and his helpers spoke openly and boldly when they presented the gospel message to the people in Thessalonica. They didn’t suspend their ministry in the face of opposition and they didn’t fall back to take a defensive position. Instead, they presented the message of salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ openly and with conviction.

Our enemy doesn’t want others to hear about the good news. He wants to silence us and intimidate us so that we will be afraid to speak the truth. Also, notice that the courage and conviction with which they performed their ministry didn’t come from internal fortitude or gritty determination on their own part. They knew that the message they proclaimed came from God, and they relied on the Holy Spirit to give them the message to deliver and the boldness to deliver it.

Too often today, Christians lose heart when they face opposition to their ministries. Sometimes it appears as if they are looking for an excuse to back down and take the easy road of appeasement. Instead, we all need to bathe our efforts in prayer, asking God to give us boldness in proclaiming the gospel message to a lost world.

Application

Have you suffered as a result of proclaiming the gospel message or teaching the truth as given to us in the pages of the Bible? Don't lose heart, my friend! Seek God's face and step out with spiritual courage, serving God faithfully. That doesn't mean that the opposition will stop, it just means you're being faithful to God's calling on your life. Go forth boldly!

1 Thessalonians 2:3 - Minister Righteously

For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity, nor *was it* in deceit.

Truth to Learn

All ministries should be performed honestly and for God.

Behind the Words

“Exhortation” is translated from *paraklēsis*, which is derived from *parakaleō*, meaning “to call near” or “to call alongside.” It is a picture of someone who has come alongside to coach, encourage, or comfort. *Paraklēsis* refers to comfort, encouragement or to urgent instruction, challenging someone to make a change.

The Greek word translated “error” is *planē*, which refers to “a wandering away from the proper path.” Figuratively, it refers to doctrinal error. It expresses the notion of passive error rather than intentional deception.

The word “impurity” is translated from *akatharsia*, which is made up of the privative *a*, meaning “not” or “without” and a form of *kathairō*, meaning “to cleanse.” Thus, *akatharsia* refers to “doing something in an unclean or immoral manner.” In the New Testament it generally refers to sensual impurity.

“Deceit” is from the Greek noun *dolos*, which is derived from the verb *delō*, meaning “to bait.” It is often used metaphorically, as it is here, meaning “fraud” or “deceit.”

Meaning Explained

In the latter half of the first chapter of this letter, Paul spoke of the evangelistic nature of his ministry to the Thessalonians. Now, through verse twelve, he gives a defense of the type of pastoral, teaching ministry he and his companions performed. He refers to this phase of his ministry as “exhortation.” Preaching the gospel and evangelizing the lost is only a portion of a pastor’s ministry. In Ephesians we learn that the purpose of the specially gifted spiritual leaders, including pastors/teachers, is to equip those under their care so that the church members can perform the work of the ministry.

And He gave some *to be* apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, (**Ephesians 4:11-12**)

Unfortunately, many pastors today focus almost exclusively on evangelism, producing a flock that is saved but spiritually immature and ill equipped to evangelize and minister to others.

The Apostle tells his readers that his preaching and teaching were not based on erroneous doctrine. Even though this letter was written very early in the life of Christianity, there were already others whose teaching was based on man’s ideas rather than on God’s word. And, he says that his ministry was not based on impurity and immorality. Pagan religions of the time incorporated immoral sexual practices which enticed many to join.

Finally, Paul tells us that he did not use deceptive practices or trickery to perform the tasks that God had given him to do. His teaching was straight-up and straightforward, the truth and nothing but the truth.

Application

Whatever ministry you have within your local church, take a lesson from Paul. Perform it as plainly, forthrightly, and honestly as you possibly can. Don't seek attention or glory for yourself; give all the glory and praise to God.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 - Be a God Pleaser

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

Truth to Learn

Proclaim the simple truth and seek God's approval alone.

Behind the Words

“Approved” is translated from the Greek word *dokimadzō*, which means “to test something to determine its value.” It is not a testing to find flaws or fault, but a testing to determine worth. It is expressed here in the perfect tense indicating past completed action with an ongoing effect. Hence, Paul is saying “we have been tested and found worthy; therefore, we now have God's approval.”

The word translated “entrusted” is *pisteuō*, which means “to believe, to have faith in, or to trust.” It is expressed here in the passive voice (action done to the subject). Thus, it means “to be believed in” or “to be entrusted.”

“Pleasing” is from the Greek verb *areskō* which means “to be content with, or to be pleased with.” In the New Testament this word has evolved in emphasis from the end result (others being pleased with us) to the active pursuit (working to please others). Thus, instead of expressing a relationship, it expresses a behavior as an attempt to influence a relationship.

The word translated “tests” is another form of the verb *dokimadzō*, as we just saw means “to test something to determine its value.”

Meaning Explained

In yesterday's verse we noted that from verse three on, Paul is talking about the pastoral/teaching phase of his ministry among the Thessalonians. Previously, he had been talking about his evangelistic ministry there. And, as was pointed out in verse one of this chapter, it appears that Paul is now defending himself against some accusations that have been made. In yesterday's verse it appears that he was defending himself against a claim that he was teaching false doctrine or that he was using deceptive means to convince his listeners to accept the truth he was proclaiming. These claims possibly came from those Jews who first heard his messages regarding Jesus but did not believe (**Acts 17:2-5**).

In preaching the gospel message and teaching the truths of God's word, we are handling messages of extreme importance and of inestimable worth. How we deliver these messages indicates how much respect we have for them. When we declare these messages, we are not trying to endear ourselves to others; we are not trying to win others over to “our side.” We are proclaiming truths that God has given to us, and we are relying on the Spirit of God to carry these truths and to open up the hearts of men to receive them. Our job is not to make converts nor is it to convince people with fancy words or clever communication techniques. Our job is simply to proclaim the truth and to let God take care of the rest. Paul was not trying to make his listeners like him; he was trying to please God who called him to his ministry.

The great preacher Dwight Moody is said to have been approached by a man who said, “I saw one of your converts in a bar getting drunk last night” to which Moody is said to have replied,

“Yes it may have been one of my converts. If he was one of God’s converts he wouldn’t have been there.”

Application

Whatever your spiritual gifts and whatever ministry God has placed you in, don’t seek the approval of men. Instead, seek God’s approval by being diligent and faithful to Him.

1 Thessalonians 2:5 - No Deceptive Practices

For neither at any time did we come with flattering words, as you know, nor with a pretense of covetousness—God is witness.

Truth to Learn

Christians don't need to be deceptive to deliver the truth.

Behind the Words

The words “at any time” are from *pote*, which means “at some time” or “ever.” It can be used to refer to sometime in the past or in the future. Here it obviously refers to the past.

“Flattering” is translated from *kolakeias*, which does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. It refers to “excessive compliments” or “insincere praise.”

Prophasis is the Greek word translated “pretense.” It is composed of *pro*, meaning “before” and *phainō*, meaning “to shine.” It refers to an outward show or a pretense used to hide the real intent of the speaker.

“Covetousness” is from the Greek word *pleonexia*, which is made up of a form of *pleiōn*, meaning “more” and *echo*, meaning “to have.” *Pleonexia* refers to the desire to have more, that is, greediness or covetousness.

Meaning Explained

The apostle is in the middle of a defense of the type of ministry he had among the Thessalonians. This verse gives us more clues as to the type of criticism or attacks that were leveled against him. In yesterday's verse he told his readers that his purpose for declaring the gospel was not to make people feel good about him or his message. The whole reason for his ministry was to be pleasing to God. His defense in the current verse is that he didn't use excessive compliments or unearned praise to try to influence his listeners.

It seems that many public speakers of that day used flattery and insincere praise in their speeches to make the listeners feel better about themselves and about the speaker. It was common to praise people for their beauty, wealth, accomplishments, or talent to make others more accepting of the message that was being delivered. A good example of this is given to us in Acts chapter twenty-four. When Paul was taken to Caesarea to be judged by the governor, a man named Tertullus opened his accusation before Felix like this:

Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we accept *it* always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. (**Acts 24:2b-4**)

Paul says that he never resorted to such deceptive practices. He also said that he didn't try to hide his real intentions because he was not trying to gain anything from his listeners. Today there are television preachers who use such techniques to persuade viewers to give money to their ministries. Their real motive is not to help viewers grow in their faith, but to help themselves grow in their wealth. Paul's intention, however, was not to get something for himself, but to give something of real worth to the people of Thessalonica, and he calls upon God as his witness to the type of ministry he had among them.

Application

Christians have a powerful message and great truths that lead to freedom. We don't need to resort to deception or trickery to deliver our message because we proclaim the truth!

1 Thessalonians 2:6 - It's Not About Us

Nor seeking glory from men, either from you or from others, being able to be in authority as apostles of Christ.

Truth to Learn

Paul didn't make personal demands, even when he could have.

Behind the Words

The word “seeking” is from the Greek verb *dzēteō*, which means “to seek after” or “to try to find.”

“Glory” is translated from *doxa*, which is derived from the verb *dokeō*, meaning “to think” or “to recognize.” *Doxa* refers to favorable thought or opinion. In a secondary sense it means “reputation, praise, honor, or splendor.”

The first occurrence of the word “from” is translated from *ex*, meaning “out of.” What Paul is saying is that he and his associates did not try to extract praise out of others; they did not manipulate the thoughts of others to receive recognition.

The words “being able” are translated from *dunamai*, meaning “to have the ability or power.”

“Authority” is the translation of *baros*, which refers to “a weight, a load, or a burden.” So, a literal translation of this portion of the current verse would be, “having the ability to be burdensome.”

Meaning Explained

This is now a third defense given against the accusations that apparently had been leveled against Paul and his co-workers. The first two were that they didn't minister to the Thessalonians simply to make people feel good, and they didn't use flattering words and false praises to endear people to themselves or their message.

In today's verse he says that they didn't try to manipulate people to draw praise out of them. Their ministry was not about personal glory or recognition. Paul's ever present goal in his life was to bring praise to God. In fact, later in verse thirteen, he tells them that it wasn't his own message that he delivered to them, it was the word of God.

He now makes an interesting comment to the Christians in Thessalonica. He says, in effect, “We had every right to be a burden to you, to make demands of you, because we are apostles of Christ, but we didn't do so.” There are some who think this is a reference to the fact that the apostles didn't expect financial support from the Thessalonians while they were ministering there. Verse nine seems to support this belief. Others, including Calvin, believed he is saying that the apostles could have used their authority to demand unqualified obedience from those to whom they ministered, but they didn't. Paul had similar things to say to the Corinthian Christians in **1 Corinthians 9:8-15**.

One final note on this verse, notice that Paul uses the word apostles (plural). This implies that Paul believed that at least Silvanus and possibly Timothy were also apostles of Christ.

Application

Some people within the church seem to expect to receive recognition or praise for the work they do. That's not why Paul worked as hard as he did, and we shouldn't either. We should all put as much effort into our ministries as we possibly can, not expecting anything in return. Instead, let's serve Him so that God will get all the glory and all the praise.

1 Thessalonians 2:7 - Caring Like Mothers

But we became gentle among you, just as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children.

Truth to Learn

Christian service should demonstrate love and care for others.

Behind the Words

“Gentle” is translated from the Greek word *nēpios*, which is made up of *nē*, meaning “not” and *epos*, which refers to “a spoken word.” Thus, *nēpios* literally means “one who does not speak.” Its common usage is a reference to “infants,” that is, “those who have not yet learned how to talk.” On many Greek manuscripts, however, this word appears as *ēpios*, meaning “one who is gentle, easy, or mild.” This seems to make more sense in the reading of this verse.

The words “among you” are from the Greek *en mesō humōn*, which literally translates to “in the midst of you (plural).” This implies a more intimate interaction between the apostles and the people of Thessalonica.

Trophos is the word translated “nursing *mother*.” It is derived from the verb *trephō*, meaning “to nourish, feed, or nurture.” It generally refers to “a nurse, someone who nurses an infant.” In classical Greek it was often used to indicate “a mother.”

“Tenderly cares for” is from the verb *thalpō*, which literally means “to make warm.” Figuratively, it means “to brood over, to foster, or to cherish.”

The word “children” is translated from the Greek noun *teknon*. This is based on the verb *tiktō* which means “to bear a child,” thus *teknon* refers to “an offspring” or “a child.”

Meaning Explained

In defense against false accusations, Paul has been telling the Christians in Thessalonica what the true intentions of the apostles had been while they ministered there. In the previous verse he said that they didn’t lay heavy burdens on the people to whom they ministered.

In Behind the Words we noted that there is a variation in this verse. Some manuscripts have *nēpios* (infants) while others have *ēpios* (gentle ones). Paul says that they were like a nursing mother who tenderly takes care of her children. It doesn’t make sense that he would say the apostles were children in the midst of those people and at the same time say that they were like a mother. So, his message is, instead of laying heavy burdens on the people, he and his co-workers were gentle and treated the Thessalonians with the same tender love and concern that a mother does for her own children.

Paul may have been making a reference to Moses’ complaint when he referred to himself as a nursing mother to Israel:

Did I conceive all these people? Did I give birth to them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? (**Numbers 11:12**)

One of the hallmarks of Paul's (and Moses') ministry was that he performed his responsibilities out of his love for God and his concern for the welfare of those to whom he ministered.

Application

All of our service for God should be done out of our love for Him and our desire to gently help others to become more Christ-like. This is the heart of a true servant of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 - Spiritual Parenting

So, yearning for you, we were well pleased to give to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

Truth to Learn

Mature Christians help younger Christians grow.

Behind the Words

“So” is from the Greek word *houtōs*, meaning “in this way.”

The word “yearning” is translated from the Greek verb *himeiromai*, meaning “to have a strong affection for, or remembrance of.” It is a term of endearment which was most often used of a mother and father toward their children. This is the only place in the New Testament where it appears.

“We were well pleased” is from the verb *eudokeō*, which is composed of *eu*, meaning “well” or “good” and *dokeō*, meaning “to think.” It is expressed in the imperfect tense indicating past, on-going action.

Metadidōmi is the verb translated “to give.” It is composed of *meta*, meaning “with” and *didōmi*, meaning “to give.” This word means “to share something with someone else.”

The word translated “dear” is *agapētos*, meaning “someone who is dearly loved.”

Meaning Explained

In the previous verse, the Apostle Paul used the imagery of a nursing mother to express to the Christians in Thessalonica how gentle and caring he and his fellow-workers were toward these new Christians. In one sense, these people really were children. They were young children in the faith. When Paul wrote this letter to them, the church in Thessalonica may have been less than a year old, with none of them having been a Christian longer than that.

In a similar manner, Paul later told the Christians in Corinth that, although they had most likely been Christians more than a year, they were still babies in their faith. Because they were letting their fleshly desires control them instead of the Spirit of God, they needed to be fed with milk (baby food) instead of adult food.

And I, brothers, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to infants in Christ. I fed you milk and not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*.

Indeed, even now you are not able; **(1 Corinthians 3:1-2)**

The Thessalonians, on the other hand, were simply very young Christians. Therefore, as their spiritual parents Paul said that he, Sylvanus, and Timothy acted like doting parents to them, tenderly caring for them, feeding them with milk, watching over them, gently challenging them, and encouraging them. In fact, Paul and his companions were so affectionately tied to the Christians in Thessalonica that he referred to them as “dearly beloved ones.” And, like any loving parents, Paul and the others would have given their very lives in order to protect and nurture these new Christians.

Application

Let me ask you, my friend, where are you in your own spiritual maturity? Are you a baby in the Lord? Then do all you can to learn and grow. Give yourself to God and serve Him with all your heart. Have you been a Christian for years? Then be a spiritual parent to the babes in Christ. Be gentle, feed them, care for them, and encourage them like a loving parent.

1 Thessalonians 2:9 - Hard Labor

For you recall, brothers, our labor and hard work; laboring night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

Truth to Learn

Serving God sometimes requires hard work.

Behind the Words

“**Labor**” is translated from the Greek word *kopos*, which literally means “to strike or hit something.” Throughout the New Testament it is used figuratively to refer to “wearisome effort, or labor.”

The words “**hard word**” are from *mochthos*, which refers to “difficult labor.” It refers to a type of work which is greater in effort and difficulty than *kopos*; that is, the kind of work which produces fatigue because of how hard the work is.

“**Laboring**” is translated from *ergadzomai*, which is based on *ergon*, meaning “work.” *Ergadzomai* is a generic term for work or labor of any kind.

Nux is the Greek word for “**night**” and *hemera* is the Greek word for “**day**.” They are both expressed in the genitive case, so we could translate this as “by night and by day.” The implication is that they started their ministry early in the morning (probably before dawn) and worked until after dark.

The word “**burden**” is translated from *epibareō*, which is made up of *epi*, meaning “on” or “upon” and the verb *bareō* (from *baros*, meaning “a weight” or “a burden”). Thus, we see that *epibareō* means “to lay a heavy burden on someone” or “to be burdensome to others.”

Meaning Explained

In the previous two verses Paul told the Christians in the church in Thessalonica that he and his companions nurtured and cared for the people there like loving parents care for their dearly beloved children. He is telling them now how hard they worked for the sake of these young Christians. They put a lot of effort into not being burdensome to the church in Thessalonica. In his later letter to the Thessalonians, Paul explained this further, saying:

nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hard working night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves a model for you, so that you would follow our example. (2 Thessalonians 3:8-9)

We learn from Paul's letter to the Philippians that they provided financial support to Paul and his co-workers while they were in Thessalonica.

... no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone. For even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my necessities. (Philippians 4:15b-16)

We also know from **Acts 18:3** that Paul worked as a tentmaker while he was in Corinth. It is quite likely that he also performed that trade while in Thessalonica to help cover some of his financial needs.

Application

Serving God is hard work and it sometimes requires hard work not directly related to our ministry. When you stand before God, will He be pleased with how hard you worked to serve Him? We can all learn a lesson from Paul's efforts.

1 Thessalonians 2:10 - Blameless Ministers

You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and righteously and blamelessly we were to you who believe;

Truth to Learn

Christians should be blameless in whatever ministry they are engaged in.

Behind the Words

The word “witnesses” is translated from *martus*, from which we get our English word “martyr” (someone who has given his or her life as a witness of their belief). *Martus* means “someone who gives testimony as a witness of some act or event.”

“Devoutly” is from *hosiōs*, which refers to “piety,” that is “a demonstration of obedience to God’s will and devotion to serving Him.”

Dikiōs is the Greek word translated “righteously.” It is derived from *dikios*, meaning “that which is right or just.” Therefore *dikiōs* refers to “doing that which is right or just.”

“Blamelessly” is from *amemptōs*, which is made up of the privative *a*, meaning “without” or “not” and a form of the verb *memphomai*, meaning “to find fault.” Thus, *amemptōs* refers to “acting without fault or blame.”

The word “were” is the translation of the verb *ginomai*, meaning “to become” or “to be.”

Meaning Explained

Paul is continuing his defense against apparent attacks on his character and ministry while serving God among the Christians at Thessalonica. Based on his previous defensive arguments it appears that he had been accused of:

- Using deceptive practices to teach doctrinal error.
- Simply being “men pleasers,” using flattering words to make the people feel good so that Paul and his companions could gain material goods from them.
- Seeking their own glory and being harsh, laying heavy burdens on those to whom they ministered.
- Being lazy while expecting the Thessalonians to provide for all their material needs.

Based on the current verse, it appears that Paul, Sylvanus, and Timothy had also been accused of behaving themselves improperly and dishonestly while they ministered there. In defense of this, Paul calls for his witnesses.

In the Old Testament two witnesses had to testify the same thing regarding any accusation in order to ascertain the truth (**Deuteronomy 19:15**). Paul is satisfying this requirement by appealing to God as well as the people in the church in Thessalonica. He says that they are witnesses to the fact that Paul and his co-workers were not only devout and obedient to God in their personal lives, but they also acted justly and blamelessly while performing their ministry. Paul’s ministry was always characterized by being obedient to God’s call on his life, and he

always did what was just and right. So much so, in fact, that he could remind the people that no one could legitimately blame him for any wrongdoing.

Application

My prayer for each of you is that you perform whatever ministry God has given you in such a manner that you may be found blameless in the sight of God and of men.

1 Thessalonians 2:11 - Father Paul

as you know how we were encouraging, and comforting every one of you, as a father *does* his own children,

Truth to Learn

We all need some comfort, encouragement, and challenge.

Behind the Words

The word “as” is from the Greek word *kathaper*. This word is made up of *katha*, meaning “as” and *per*, meaning “very.” The word *kathaper* literally means “exactly as” or “just as.”

“You know” is translated from the verb *eidō*, which means “to see with perception.” As in English, this verb can refer to visibly seeing something and perceiving what it is, or it can mean “to see with the mind,” that is, “to know.”

The word “encouraging” is from *parakaleō*. It is made up of *para*, meaning “to the side of” and *kaleō*, meaning “to call.” It is a picture of someone being “called alongside” for the purpose of coaching, encouraging, challenging, and comforting.

“Comforting” is translated from *paramutheomai*, which is made up of *para*, meaning “to the side of” and *mutheomai*, meaning “to make a speech” or “to tell a tale.” *Paramutheomai* means “to speak soothingly” or “to console.”

Meaning Explained

Back in verses six through eight, Paul used the metaphor of a mother caring for her infant children to show how tenderly he and his companions ministered to the Christians in Thessalonica. Now he changes his metaphor to that of a father. At the time this letter was written it was the mother’s responsibility to feed and care for the children. The father’s responsibility was to help the children mature, to challenge them, to encourage them, and to comfort them.

First of all, notice in the previous verse that Paul called the Thessalonians as witnesses of his behavior among them. Now he says that they know from observation how he raised them in the faith. These two facts further indicate the close relationship he had with the people who were under his spiritual care. He wasn’t some demagogue, preaching fire and brimstone from the pulpit while keeping his distance from his congregation. He was directly involved with them daily, on a personal level.

When the spiritual battles and hardships of life caused them to become discouraged, he encouraged them. When they experienced set-backs and failures, he comforted them. However, he didn’t let them wallow in their self-pity and he certainly didn’t coddle them. Instead, he challenged them to grow in their faith walk. He taught them the difficult aspects of walking closely with their God. He used examples from his own life to show them that we all have difficulties in this life, but we don’t give up. When our sin nature or life’s problems knock us down, we get back up and get back into the race. It’s this kind of discipline that makes us stronger. The writer of Hebrews said a similar thing about staying in the race:

... let us lay aside every burden, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (**Hebrews 12:1b**)

Application

Are you going through difficult times? Has life, or sin, knocked you down? If so, get back up, fix your eyes on God, get back in the race, and “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, be men, be strong” (**1 Corinthians 16:13**).

1 Thessalonians 2:12 - Walking Worthy

and testifying that you walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Truth to Learn

Encouragement and instruction help us to become more godly.

Behind the Words

“Testifying” is from the Greek verb *marturomai*. This word is derived from *martus*, meaning “a witness.” This is the word from which we get our English word martyr, meaning someone who gives their life as a witness, or testimony, of their faith.

The word “that” is translated from a form of idiom that Paul uses frequently. It consists of *eis to* and the infinitive of the following verb. A literal translation would be “unto this thing.” The effect of this idiom is to tie what was just said to what is about to be said. In effect, Paul is saying, “the reason I encouraged and comforted every one of you is so that you might ...”

“Walk” is from the Greek verb *peripateō*. This is made up of *peri*, meaning “around” or “about” and *pateō*, meaning “to walk.” So you can see that this verb literally means “to walk around” or “to walk about.” Figuratively, it refers to the manner in which a person lives his or her life.

The word “worthy” is from *axiōs*, which is derived from *agō*, meaning “to weigh.” It is a picture of an item being put on a scale to determine its worth or worthiness.

“Calls” is translated from the verb *kaleō*, which means “to call or to hail someone.” In its primary sense this verb refers to calling someone so that he or she might come or go somewhere.

“Glory” is translated from *doxa*, which is derived from the verb *dokeō*, meaning “to think” or “to recognize.” *Doxa* refers to favorable thought or opinion. In a secondary sense it means “reputation, praise, honor, glory, or splendor.”

Meaning Explained

Paul says that he performed the functions of a father figure to the Thessalonians so that their lives might measure up to what one would expect from a child of God. In performing the fatherly function, he sometimes had to do the difficult things. Things like scolding and correcting wrong actions and attitudes have to be done if a child is to learn proper behavior. Back in verse eight he informed the Thessalonian believers that they had become dear to him. We noted that the word translated “dear” in that verse is *agapētos*, indicating a strong motherly or fatherly love for the people. So, like a loving father, Paul did what was necessary to raise them up spiritually.

We find out now that Paul’s motives were not selfish. He was not seeking his own glory. He fathered the Thessalonian church so that these Christians would be able to live their lives in a manner that is worthy of a child of God. We also learn something here regarding how God is treating all of his dear children. There are numerous verses in the New Testament indicating the fact that we have been called to salvation and service by God. Here we learn that he is continually calling us. This is like a father at a soccer game giving a son or daughter instructions and encouragement from the sidelines. Why does God do this? Because He wants us in His kingdom, and He wants us to experience His glory.

Application

Do you have an earthly “father in the Lord,” someone who teaches you, comforts you, and challenges you? When was the last time you thanked him for being a godly example to you? Why not send him a note. It might just be the encouragement he needs today.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 - God's Effective Work

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, 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 is in truth, the word of God, which also works in you who believe.

Truth to Learn

Any success we might have is because of God, not us.

Behind the Words

The words “we ... thank” are translated from the verb *eucharisteō*, which is made up of *eu*, meaning “good” or “well” and a form of *charidzomai*, meaning “to grant” or “to give.” The basic meanings of this word include “to show oneself to be pleased or grateful” or “to give thanks.”

Adialeiptōs is the Greek word translated “without ceasing.” It is a double compound word made up of *a*, meaning “without,” *dia*, meaning “through” or “between,” and a form of the verb *leipō*, meaning “to leave.” Thus, *adialeiptōs* literally means “without leaving space between.” In other words, it means doing something without pausing or stopping.

“You received” is from the Greek verb *paralambanō*. This word is made up of *para*, meaning “from” and *lambanō*, meaning “to take” or “to receive.” This word means “to receive from someone else” or “to receive to oneself.”

“You accepted” is translated from *dechomai*, which means “to accept something deliberately and readily.”

The word “works” is from the verb *energeō*. This word is based on *energēs*, meaning “operative, active, or working.” Thus, *energeō* means “to be at work” or “to be effective.”

Meaning Explained

One of the hallmarks of the Apostle Paul's ministry is his repeated thankfulness to God. He realized, without a doubt, that his ministry, its effectiveness, and its result were all due to God's working in him, not his own efforts. He also realized that his message was not something that he made up or delivered in his own personal eloquent style. He knew that he was not the originator of the message, simply the messenger. As a result, he reminded the Christians in Thessalonica that the message they heard from him is not of human origin, but God's word.

You may recall from the first chapter of this letter that these believers were undergoing persecution (a point which he will reiterate in the upcoming verses). Under similar persecution, Christians of all ages have found comfort and encouragement in the words of Holy Scripture. Paul also reminds his readers here that God's word is truth. Notice that in His closing prayer at the last supper, Jesus declared plainly that it is the truth which sets us apart from the rest of the world (**John 17:17**). In similar fashion, throughout the apostolic teaching in the New Testament, the writers give testimony that God's word is truth (**2 Corinthians 4:2, 6:7; Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:15; James 1:18; 1 John 3:18**).

Application

Let us all remember that we are here to serve God, not ourselves. In whatever ministry we find ourselves, our responsibility is to represent our King and it is His message we deliver. Therefore,

any success which we might have is the result of His working, not ours. Give Him thanks and praise!

1 Thessalonians 2:14 - Family Suffering

For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Jews,

Truth to Learn

Many Christians suffer at the hands of friends and relatives.

Behind the Words

“**Imitators**” is from the word *mimētēs*, which we saw in the sixth verse of the previous chapter. It refers to “someone who mimics, imitates, or follows the example of someone else.”

The word “**churches**” is translated from the word *ekklēsia*, which is made up of *ek*, meaning “out” and a form of the verb *kaleō*, meaning “to call.” It literally refers to “the called out ones.” Originally, this word referred to an assembly of citizens who were called out by civil authorities. It is used throughout the New Testament, however, to refer to the church, either a local assembly or the world-wide church.

Paschō is the Greek word translated “**suffered**.” This word means “to undergo an experience,” “to be subjected to evil,” or “to suffer.”

The words “**your own**” are from *idios* which means “pertaining to yourself.”

“**Countrymen**” is translated from *sumphuletēs*, which is made up of *sun*, meaning “together with” and a form of *phulē*, which refers to “a family,” “a tribe,” or “a race of people.”

Meaning Explained

In yesterday’s verse Paul said that he was thankful for the way the people of the church in Thessalonica received the Word of God. As a result of receiving and believing the gospel message they became Christians, members of the family of God.

Now he says something very interesting about these new believers. He says that they became imitators of the members of the Christian churches in Judea. It’s interesting that he refers to the Judean Christians as being members of the “**churches of God ... in Christ Jesus**.” The reason for referring to them in this way is that the followers of Judaism in Judea referred to themselves as a “church” as well. Early in the life of the church, Christians were thought of as nothing more than a new sect of Judaism. Paul is making it very clear that he is not referring to the followers of Judaism who met in a synagogue every week, but to the followers of Jesus Christ.

We learn here that the manner in which the Thessalonians were imitating the churches in Judea was in their suffering. He’s not so much indicating that they suffered alike, but that they also suffered at the hands of their own countrymen. Paul was very familiar with the way the Judean Christians suffered because he, himself, was one of the Jews who persecuted Christians there (see **Acts 8:1-3**). The Thessalonian Christians also suffered at the hands of their own countrymen. This persecution may have originated with Jews, but it was later carried out by the Greek people of Macedonia as well.

Application

Do your friends and family members treat you differently because you are a Christian? If so, you're in good company. Don't hate them for it, continue to pray for them, that God would open their hearts to believe the Gospel message as well.

1 Thessalonians 2:15 - Suffering Is Good?

who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God but *are* contrary to all men,

Truth to Learn

Persecution and suffering can make us stronger Christians.

Behind the Words

The word translated “killed” is from the Greek verb *apokteinō*. This word is made up of *apo*, meaning “from” or “away from,” used here as an intensifier and *kteinō* meaning “to slay” or “to kill.” *Apokteinō* means “to kill outright.” This word indicates an intentional killing rather than an accidental killing.

“Prophets” is transliterated (a word brought from one language directly into another) from the word *prophētēs*. This word is made up of *pro*, meaning “before in time or location” and *phēmi*, meaning “to show or make known one’s thoughts.” Thus, *prophētēs* can mean “one who tells something before it happens” or “one who makes a proclamation in front of others.”

The words “drove us out” is from *ekdiōkō*. It is made up of *ek*, meaning “out” or “out of,” used as an intensifier and *diōkō*, meaning “to pursue or persecute.” Therefore, *ekdiōkō* means “to drive out” or “to banish.” This word implies a stronger persecution than that which is spoken of in **Romans 12:14**.

Enantios is the word translated “contrary.” It is made up of *en*, meaning “in” and *antios*, meaning “set against.” It is a picture of an army in the field set in battle array against an opposing army. It is sometimes translated “opposed to” or “opposite.”

Meaning Explained

In the previous verse Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica that they had become like the Christians in Judea because they suffered at the hands of the people of their own country. He reminds us here that the Jews killed their own Messiah as well as many of their own prophets. In the book of Acts, Peter described the killing of Jesus this way:

He, delivered by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified by the hands of lawless men and put *him* to death; (**Acts 2:23**)

Some people argue that Jesus was not killed by the Jews, but by the Romans. The reason for this is that under Roman law the Jews were not permitted to execute anyone for violating their religious laws, even though those laws required death by stoning for some offenses. However, Jesus was found innocent by the Romans. Also notice that Jesus was convicted by the Jews for claiming to be God, a claim they considered to be blasphemous, but was in fact true. Therefore, because the Jews weren’t permitted to execute Him, they insisted that the Romans carry out the execution for them.

Paul also tells us here that those who persecute Christians are not pleasing to God. But couldn’t God have stopped the persecution? Couldn’t He have prevented the crucifixion of Jesus? The answer, of course, is “yes” to both these questions. However, God had a purpose for both the crucifixion of Jesus and the persecution of Christians.

Application

If you are suffering as a Christian, it doesn't necessarily mean that God is displeased with you. It may be that He is allowing it so that you will become a stronger Christian. Thank Him for it!

1 Thessalonians 2:16 - Proclaim It Fearlessly

hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has suddenly come upon them to the uttermost.

Truth to Learn

Christians are to share the Gospel, in spite of persecution.

Behind the Words

“**Hindering**” is translated from the Greek verb *kōluō*, which is related to the noun *kolos*, which refers to “a dwarf.” The verb *kōluō* means “to weaken” or “to cut off.” In its common usage, it means “to hinder, restrain, or prevent.”

Laleō is the verb translated “**speaking**.” It refers to verbal conversation in general, as opposed to the content of the conversation, which would be the word *legō*.

The word “**Gentiles**” is from the Greek noun *ethnos*. This word literally refers to “a group of people belonging and living together.” In Greek secular writing, it primarily refers to “a race of people” or “a nation.” The Jews used this word to refer to anyone who was not a Jew, that is, a Gentile.

“**Saved**” is translated from *sodzō*, which means “to rescue from danger or destruction.” It is expressed here in the subjunctive mood, indicating the possibility or probability of it happening.

“**Always**” is translated from *pantote*, which is made up of a form of *pas*, meaning “all” and *tote*, meaning “then.” Therefore, *pantote* means “all the time.”

The words “**fill up**” are from *anaplēroō*. This is composed of *ana*, meaning “up,” used as an intensifier, and *plēroō*, meaning “to fill.” Thus, *anaplēroō* means “to fill up completely.”

The words “**has suddenly come upon**” are from the verb *phthanō*, meaning “to come suddenly and unexpectedly.”

“**Uttermost**” is from *telos*, meaning “the termination,” “the completion,” or “the end.”

Meaning Explained

The Thessalonian Christians were just told that they are suffering in the same way as the Christians in Judea, at the hands of their own countrymen. Paul now describes the motivation behind such persecution. He says that their countrymen were hindering them from having conversations with the people around them so that these people might not hear and believe the gospel message, thus getting saved.

This sounds very contemporary, doesn't it? Even in our own country, which was originally based on religious freedom and the freedom of speech, our countrymen are trying to prevent us from spreading the good news. Prayer has been taken out of our schools and teachers are forbidden from sharing the Gospel message. Discussions about sin and salvation are hindered in the workplace and many government offices have forbidden the display of Christian materials.

But Paul tells us that the consequences of such hindering of the Gospel will be far worse for those who are hindering our witness than they will be for us. Their actions will be judged at the

Great White Throne Judgment and they will experience the wrath of God, while we will only know the peace of God.

Application

Don't be discouraged from sharing the Gospel message with people around you. Keep in mind that it is "... the power of God unto salvation ..." (**Romans 1:16**) that causes people to believe, not your own persuasiveness.

1 Thessalonians 2:17 - Orphaned Christians

But we, brothers, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in spirit, were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.

Truth to Learn

Persecution of Christians occurs world-wide today.

Behind the Words

The words “**having been taken away**” are translated from the Greek verb *aporphanidzō*. This word is made up of *apo*, meaning “from” or “away from” and *orphanos* (from which we get our English word orphan). *Orphanos* means “obscure” or “dark,” like an orphan who, without parents, was often forced to wander in obscurity and darkness. Thus, *aporphanidzō* means to be made alone and helpless, without parents.

“**For a short time**” is from the Greek words *kairon horas*. *Kairon* refers to a period of time or “a season,” and *horas* means “an hour.” Therefore, *kairon horas* literally means “a season of an hour.” Metaphorically, it means “for a short time.”

The word “**more**” is translated from *perissōs*, which means “abundantly” or “exceedingly.” It implies a much greater amount than just “more.”

“**Eager**” is from *spoudadzō*, which is based on *spoudē*, meaning “speed, haste, or diligence.” *Spoudadzō*, therefore, means “to be eager, diligent, or earnest.”

Both of the words “**presence**” and “**face**” are translated from *prosōpon*, which literally means “before your eyes.” It is the word that refers to a person’s face, but it also means “in someone’s presence” (just as we might refer to close proximity as “being in your face”).

Meaning Explained

In the last few verses Paul has been telling the Christians in Thessalonica how he, and they, have been persecuted by their fellow countrymen. They were hindered from witnessing the Gospel truth because of it. Paul and his companions even suffered physical persecution. In fact, the opposition was so great that Paul and Silas had to be scurried out of town at night:

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. (Acts 17:10a)

Paul has used the personal family metaphors of a nursing mother and a father to describe his relationship with, and love for, the Thessalonians. Now he uses even more emotional words to describe his separation from these dear people. He says, “**having been taken away from you**,” that is, “having been orphaned from you.” This is very descriptive of the heart wrenching pain of their sudden separation from each other.

However, Paul informs his children in the Lord that this separation is only for a short time. We don’t know for sure how long he had been gone from Thessalonica when he wrote this letter; it may have only been a few months. And we will learn in this verse and the next verse that Paul had already tried to return to Thessalonica, but he wasn’t able to. He tells his readers that he had tried very hard to return to them so that he could at least see their faces again.

Application

In some countries of the world today Christians are under heavy persecution, being imprisoned or even killed because of their desire to be obedient to God. Let's all take a few minutes right now to pray to our Heavenly Father for protection and comfort for Christians everywhere who suffer for their faith.

1 Thessalonians 2:18 - Opposition to Ministries

Therefore we determined to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.

Truth to Learn

Christians' plans may be hindered by God – or by Satan.

Behind the Words

“We determined” is translated from a form of the verb *thelō*, meaning “to wish” or “to will.” However, this word implies more than just a desire. It implies purpose and determination. Therefore, we translate this as “we determined.”

The words “time and again” are from the phrase *kai hapax kai dis*, which literally means “both once and twice.” This is an idiomatic phrase meaning “several times.”

“Satan” is transliterated from the word *satanas*, which is originally of Chaldean origin, appearing in the Old Testament as *sawtawn*. The word literally means “accuser” or “adversary.” In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) it is often translated as *diabolos* (devil) and these two words are often used interchangeably.

Engkoptō is the verb translated “hindered.” It is made up of *en*, meaning “in” or “into” and *koptō*, meaning “to strike” or “to cut.” This word was used to describe the cutting of a trench in a road as a hindrance to the progress of an advancing army.

Meaning Explained

In the previous verse Paul expressed his eagerness to return to Thessalonica to be with the people there whom he considered to be his spiritual children. He now tells them that he and his co-workers were determined to return there. He makes a point here that it was not just his companions who wanted to return, but that he specifically wanted to see them in person.

We also see here that it was not just a one-time plan to return, but something they determined to do over and over again. We see from **1 Thessalonians 3:1, 2** that he had already sent Timothy back there, and probably Silvanus as well, with the purpose of encouraging and strengthening them.

Therefore, when we could endure it no longer, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith, (**1 Thessalonians 3:1-2**)

The reason that Paul gives for his not having personally returned to Thessalonica is “hindrance from Satan.” We know from the book of Acts that the Holy Spirit had prevented him from carrying out some of his plans previously (see **Acts 16:6, 7**). This time, however, he perceives that it was the direct opposition of our adversary which thwarted his plans. We are not told how Paul knew that it was Satan rather than the Holy Spirit, but he seems certain as to the source of the opposition.

In some Christian circles it is common to blame Satan for any and all opposition to Christian ministry. Keep in mind, however, that Satan is not omnipresent like God. He can't be in more

than one place at a time. More often than not, satanic attack comes from one of his hoards rather than Satan himself.

Application

When we face opposition in our ministries, we need to prayerfully consider whether it is the Spirit of God or our enemy who is standing in our way. If it is God, we need to make other plans. If it is our enemy, however, we need to prayerfully decide whether or not we need to stand and fight.

1 Thessalonians 2:19 - Present Suffering or Future Glory?

For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

Truth to Learn

Keep your focus on eternity when you suffer as a Christian.

Behind the Words

Elpis is the Greek word translated “hope.” This word signifies more than just a wish that something good will happen. It also implies a full expectation of obtaining that good thing. It could be paraphrased as “hopeful expectation.”

The word “crown” is translated from *stephanos*, which refers to the crown or wreath awarded to the winner of an athletic event. It is distinctly different than a *diadēma*, which refers to a crown of royal dignity.

“Rejoicing” is from *kauchēsis*, meaning “to boast” or “to brag.” *Kauchēsis* refers to “boasting” or “glorying” in some achievement, either of self or of others.

The words “in the presence” are translated from *emprosthen*, which is made up of *en*, meaning “in,” *pros*, meaning “to” or “toward,” and *then*, denoting a direction or a place. Thus, *emprosthen* indicates “the place directly in front of someone.”

The word “coming” is from *parousia*. This word is derived from *pareimi*, meaning “to be present.” *Parousia* can refer either to the presence of something or it can refer to the coming of someone into our presence.

Meaning Explained

Apparently, the Apostle Paul had been accused of having deserted the Christians in Thessalonica and not trying to return there. In the previous couple of verses he expressed his heart wrenching separation from them as having been orphaned. He also expressed the fact that he had repeatedly planned on returning there but was hindered from doing so by our adversary.

During times of persecution it is important to keep the future in view. Instead of continuing to focus on the current persecution that he and the Thessalonians were facing, Paul reminds them of the coming rewards for their persistence. He reminds them (and us) of our future hope we have in the coming of our Lord. He reminds them (and us) of the boasting, or glorying, that we will have at His coming. And, he reminds them (and us) of the eternal rewards we will receive when He comes back for us.

When Christ returns, all Christians will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is a time when our works will be judged for the purpose of finding good (**1 Corinthians 3:10-15**), and rewards in the form of crowns will be awarded. These rewards, and this rejoicing, will not be temporal like things in this life; these things will be eternal. Also, in recognition of the real source of all our accomplishments, we will be able to cast our crowns at His feet, proclaiming that He is the one worthy of all glory and honor (**Revelation 4:10**).

Application

Don't be discouraged, my dear Christian friends, when you suffer from opposition and persecution for your Christian witness. One day we will receive rewards for our good works done in faith. And, we will be able to give recognition and glory to our Lord for His faithfulness and empowering Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 2:20 - A Joyful Coming

For you are our glory and joy.

Truth to Learn

There will be rejoicing for Christians when Christ returns.

Behind the Words

The word “glory” is translated from the Greek word *doxa*. This word primarily means “thought” or “opinion,” especially a favorable opinion. In a secondary sense it means “reputation, praise, honor, splendor, or light.” Thus, the word *doxa*, as Paul uses it here, probably refers to the glory we receive as a result of God’s favorable opinion about our faithfulness in serving Him.

“Joy” is from *chara*, which is based on the verb *chairō*, meaning “to rejoice.” *Chara* refers to rejoicing or joy.

Meaning Explained

In the previous verse we were introduced to the idea of the “coming” of the Lord. This is not to be seen simply as a singular event, but as a period of time. This “coming” is one of the major themes of this letter to the Thessalonians. It really has several aspects with respect to Christians and to the unbelieving world.

The first aspect of Christ’s “coming” applies only to the church. It is referenced in **1 Corinthians 15:22, 23; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; and 1 John 2:28**. This is Christ’s coming at the rapture, when Christians who “sleep in Jesus” will be resurrected and those of us who are alive and remain will be “caught up together” to eternally be with the Lord. Once we have been raptured, we will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ where we will receive our rewards (in the form of crowns) for the works we have done in His name. The crown mentioned in the previous verse is sometimes referred to as the “soul winner’s crown,” since Paul seems to imply that he anticipates this reward for the gospel work he did in Thessalonica. This aspect of the “coming” is probably what Paul is describing in this verse and the previous one. It is a time when there will be glory and joy for all who have faithfully served God, even in the midst of persecution.

The second aspect of Christ’s “coming” applies to His coming to the earth in judgment of the unbelieving world. This “coming” will occur at the end of the seven year Tribulation period. References to this “coming” include **Matthew 24:3, 27; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; and 2 Thessalonians 2:8**. At this event Christ, as the conquering King, will come mounted on a white horse to defeat the armies who have mounted one final attack against Israel. This victorious coming is described in **Revelation 19:11-15**. This passage indicates that His armies are clothed in fine linen, white and clean, riding on white horses. Also, **1 Thessalonians 3:13** indicates that He will be accompanied by “all His saints.” So, the army referenced in **Revelation 19:14** probably includes all who have believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (both Christians and Jews).

The final aspect of Christ’s “coming” includes our eternal presence with the Lord. This aspect of His “coming” is referred to in **1 Corinthians 15:22, 23** and **1 Thessalonians 5:23**.

Application

For Christians, the “coming” of our Lord is repeatedly portrayed as a time of joyful rejoicing, of victory over sin and death, and eternally being in the spiritual and physical presence of our Lord. Keep these things in mind when you suffer in this life for being a Christian and for proclaiming His word.