

LESSON 3

MINISTRY TO THE THESSALONIANS (1 THESS. 2:1-16)

The Place of the Passage

“You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake,” Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:5. In 1 Thessalonians 3, he double-clicks on that statement, as it were, to remind the church of his conduct and ministry while among them. Amid rumors and accusations concerning his apostolic credentials, Paul pauses to clarify and defend his message, motives, and methods.

The Big Picture

In 1 Thessalonians 2:1–16, Paul defends his conduct as a minister of the gospel, drawing the Thessalonians’ attention to his behavior and approach among them.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the entire text for this study, 1 Thessalonians 2:1–16. Then interact with the following questions concerning this section of 1 Thessalonians and record your responses.

John Stott observes, “In [1 Thessalonians 2 and 3], more perhaps than anywhere else in his letters, [Paul] discloses his mind, expresses his emotions, and bares his soul” (*The Message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 45). That is quite a statement. How do you specifically see Paul’s pastoral heart on display in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–16?

On the surface, it seems as if Paul’s primary focus in this passage is on himself and his ministry. However, what word appears repeatedly (14 times in 16 verses)? Even while defending his genuineness as an apostle, Paul’s perspective is relentlessly God-centered. What about yours? When recounting your experiences, sharing your testimony, or explaining your actions, who is the main character—the hero—of your words, and why?

How did Paul’s “shameful treatment” in Philippi (see Acts 16:19–40) influence his ministry to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:1–2)?

What does Paul clarify concerning his message, motives, and methods—the “what,” the “why,” and the “how”—in the first several verses of 1 Thessalonians 2?

What metaphors does Paul use in this passage to describe his conduct among the Thessalonians? What is the significance of each?

1 Thessalonians 2:8 is a beautiful statement on the importance of loving those to whom we witness. Paul points out that his ministry in Thessalonica was not a hit-and-run gospel invasion. Instead, he and his associates were happy to stay, form friendships, and invest in their new

friends' lives. What are the benefits of so-called "relational" or "friendship" evangelism? Are there any dangers?

What does it mean to walk in a manner "worthy" of God (1 Thess. 2:12; see also 2 Thess. 1:5, 11; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10)? How does such language fit the reality of God's one-way grace, which assures us that we do not earn right standing with him by living a good life?

Do you think of the gospel as something mainly for Christians or mainly for non-Christians? In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul says that the "word of God"—in context synonymous with the "gospel of God" (1 Thess. 2:2, 8, 9)—is "at work in you believers." In what sense is the good news active in the hearts and lives of Christians?

Suffering for the gospel was the calling not just of the apostles (1 Thess. 2:1–2) but also of the whole congregation (1 Thess. 2:14–15). And the Thessalonians' opponents were not enemies from foreign lands but were their "own countrymen" (1 Thess. 2:14). Have you ever suffered—relationally or socially, perhaps even physically—for your Christian faith? Read and ponder Matthew 10:34–39 and Mark 10:28–30. How should Jesus' words in these passages shape our outlook on life?

How were the Jews "[opposing] all mankind" (1 Thess. 2:15)? Why do you think Paul equated opposition to evangelism (1 Thess. 2:16) with opposition to humanity (1 Thess. 2:15)? What implications might this have for our own lives?

Read through the following three sections on Gospel Glimpses, Whole-Bible Connections, and Theological Soundings. Then take time to consider and record any Personal Implications these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

SALVATION. In 1 Thessalonians 2:16, Paul connects the work of evangelism ("speaking to the Gentiles") to the miracle of salvation ("that they might be saved"). Although we tend to speak of salvation as an exclusively past event, it is actually a past (Eph. 2:8), present (1 Cor. 15:2), and future (Rom. 5:9) reality. Salvation is the all-encompassing category for what God has achieved through Christ in order to reconcile rebels to himself. All believers in Jesus have been saved from the penalty of sin (justification), are being saved from the power of sin (sanctification), and one day will be saved from the presence of sin (glorification).

Whole-Bible Connections

ISRAEL JUDGED LIKE GENTILES. In 1 Thessalonians 2:16, Paul says that the Jews who killed Jesus and who clamor to thwart gospel advance are "[filling] up the measure of their sins." This is a significant statement, as it repeats language that Genesis 15:16 applies to Gentiles. As Jesus explains in the parable of the tenants (Matt. 21:33–46), national Israel forfeited their inheritance and, through serial idolatry and adultery against their covenant Lord, became like

the Gentiles they despised. Any Jewish person who refuses to embrace Jesus the Messiah is a covenant outsider.

Definition: Gentiles

The non-Jewish peoples of the world.

Definition: Covenant

The plotline of Scripture centers on the establishment of successive covenants: God-initiated, promise-based, binding agreements between God and humans. If the Bible is the unfolding narrative of the establishment of God's kingdom, covenants are its backbone. Though there is debate over the exact number of major covenants in Scripture, many recognize covenants mediated through Adam ([Genesis 1–2](#)), Noah ([Genesis 9](#)), Abraham ([Genesis 12](#)), Moses ([Exodus 19–20](#)), David ([2 Samuel 7](#)), and a new covenant ([Jeremiah 31](#)) mediated through Christ ([Luke 22:20](#); [Hebrews 8–10](#)). Israel was chosen out of the world to be God's covenant people: "I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people" ([Lev. 26:12](#)). From a human perspective, the Old Testament is a long story of covenant failure—every covenant mediator and the entire nation of Israel ultimately failed to be faithful to the covenant Lord. The glory of the gospel, however, is that in Jesus Christ the covenant maker became the covenant keeper and then died for covenant breakers.

Theological Soundings

STEWARDSHIP. Scripture teaches that God owns all things because he created all things. As divine image-bearers, all humans have been tasked with reflecting God by ruling and cultivating the world for him. But Christians have been handed a more weighty stewardship still: the good news of King Jesus. As Paul puts it in [1 Thessalonians 2:4](#), "We have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel." *Entrusted.* This gospel treasure is not ours. It did not originate with us. It is not a rough draft. It needs no editors. Our responsibility is simply to believe it, cherish it, apply it, guard it, and proclaim it. And Paul insists that this gospel stewardship must be accompanied by pure motives and open methods: "Our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts" ([1 Thess. 2:3–4](#)).

Definition: Image-bearer

The Bible's opening pages ring with the truth that God created humans "in his image" to know and reflect him on earth ([Gen. 1:26–27](#)). Just as kings in ancient times would set up statues or "images" on the highest peaks to display their fame and rule, we too are designed to draw attention to our Maker. Though God's image in man was fractured at the fall ([Genesis 3](#)), it has not been eradicated. Jesus is the full image of the invisible God ([2 Cor. 4:4](#); [Col. 1:15](#); [Heb. 1:3](#)), and in Christians this image is being restored ([Rom. 8:29](#); [Eph. 4:24](#); [Col. 3:10](#)).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on applications of 1 Thessalonians 2:1–16 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Note the personal implications for your walk with the Lord in light of the (1) Gospel Glimpses, (2) Whole-Bible Connections, (3) Theological Soundings, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses
2. Whole-Bible Connections
3. Theological Soundings
4. 1 Thessalonians 2:1–16

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of 1 Thessalonians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study and reflect on key ideas the Lord may be teaching you.

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