

Friends Forever

(1 Thessalonians 2:13–3:13)



SABBATH—AUGUST 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 2:13–3:13; Romans 9:1–5; Romans 11:1–12, 24–32; Matthew 24:9–22; Matthew 10:42.

MEMORY VERSE: “May the Lord give you strength in your hearts. Then you will be holy and without blame in the sight of our God and Father. May that be true when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones” (1 Thessalonians 3:13, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Paul continues to praise the Thessalonians for the good things he finds in them. He also supports them in the suffering they experience from attacks against the church.

AS WE READ THESE VERSES, WE CAN UNDERSTAND THAT THE THESSALONIANS ARE NOT JUST CHURCH MEMBERS TO PAUL. They are his friends. There is a deep, emotional (having deep feelings) bond (connection) between Paul and these people. Paul points to that bond as he tries to continue reminding them of his love for them. Paul's words will also help to prepare the Thessalonians for the criticism that he soon will give them.

Paul begins and ends this part with a prayer. In a way, this whole part is written with prayer in mind. The basic theme (idea) of this prayer is Paul's desire for the Thessalonians to be “blameless [without blame or guilt] and holy” (1 Thessalonians 3:13; read also 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20) at the second coming of Jesus.

The friendship Paul has with them is deeper than earthly friendships. It is a friendship that goes beyond the limits of time and history on this earth. Paul is looking forward to spending life everlasting with the Thessalonian believers. Paul's desire is what shows his great concern throughout the letter for the Thessalonian believers' beliefs and actions. Paul loves these people and wants them to be ready for the return of Christ.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 5**THE JUDEAN EXAMPLE
(1 Thessalonians 2:13–16)**

In 1 Thessalonians 2:12–16, Paul stops talking for a few verses about pleasing God and caring for the new believers (1 Thessalonians 2:1–12). But in verse 13, he again continues the theme of how the Thessalonians accepted the apostles (teachers and leaders) and the gospel to Thessalonica.

With verse 14, Paul returns to the theme (idea) of following the apostles' examples. The attacks against the church in Thessalonica were the same in many ways as the attacks against Christians in Judea. Some Jews attacked Jewish Christians in Judea. In the same way, Gentile (non-Jewish) and Jewish neighbors together attacked the largely Gentile Christians of Thessalonica. Here Paul shows that the attacks against Christians are tied to a larger picture. Those who follow Christ always are going to face attacks from nonbelievers.



Those who follow Christ always are going to face attacks from nonbelievers.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16. What message should these verses have for us today? What do the verses not teach?

Here Paul shows his feelings about a certain group of Jews who bothered him in his evangelistic (spreading the gospel) work from place to place. These Jews caused trouble and opposition (disagreement) among the apostles. Verses in the Bible like these (read also Matthew 23:29–38) have been twisted (rewritten) to support attacks against the Jews. But that kind of writing was not in Paul's plan here. Paul was speaking about the Judean leaders (the word translated as "Jews" in 1 Thessalonians 2:14 can also be translated as "Judeans") who worked with the Romans in causing the death of Jesus. They also made it their business to stop the preaching of the gospel wherever and whenever they could. In fact, Paul seems to be retelling what Jesus already said about those who were trying to kill Him (Matthew 23:29–36).

We must keep in mind that Paul himself was a Jew. He was not criticizing an entire class of people. Jesus was Jewish. The first disciples were Jewish. Jews alone were responsible for starting the early church. Paul knew that every Jew he met, like Silas, Barnabas, and Timothy, could be a friend forever (read Romans 9:1–5 and Romans 11:1–12, 24–32).

Every person on earth is a soul "for whom Christ died" (Romans 14:15; 1 Corinthians 8:11). Judging against whole classes of people is not the

proper (right) thing to do for those who live at the foot of the Cross.

It is easy to point fingers at the church for its failure to treat whole classes of people fairly. What about ourselves? How much prejudging continues in our own hearts against certain groups of people?



Those who live at the foot of the Cross must not judge others.

MONDAY—AUGUST 6

PAUL'S HOPE AND JOY (1 Thessalonians 2:17–20)

In the 14 verses that run from 1 Thessalonians 2:17 through 3:10, Paul offers a history of what has happened since his separation from the Thessalonian believers. The theme of friendship runs throughout these verses. These Thessalonians are not just church members to Paul. They are truly friends. The verses show a lot of deep emotion (strong feelings).

Paul wants to show his love and concern for the Thessalonians along with the advice and criticism he will later

give to the church (in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5). Because of this love, Paul has earned the right to advise the church there. Advice is best received when it comes with love.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17–20. What is Paul saying here that speaks of us today?

The main verb of verse 17 (usually translated as “being taken” or “torn away”) is rooted in the word meaning orphaned.¹ When Paul has to leave Thessalonica suddenly, he feels the loss of his loved ones as deeply as if his parents have just died. Paul wants very much to visit them because he misses them dearly. They are absent in person but not in heart. Paul blames this delay on Satan. His words here show the reality of the great controversy (war) between Christ and Satan.

Paul’s desire for the Thessalonian believers is rooted in more than just everyday relationship. It has an end-time focus. Paul looks forward to “showing them [the Thessalonians] off” to Jesus after the Second Coming. They are the proof of Paul’s ministry (work done) for Christ, his end-time joy and boast! Paul wants to show that his life has made a difference in the lives of others.

What these verses should show us, too, is that we need to keep what is important, important. Our life here is but a “vapor [smoke]” (James 4:14, NKJV). But it is vapor with eternal results. Paul’s focus is on the things

1. orphaned—when a child loses his or her parents at an early age.

that have eternal value. After all, if you really think about the final fate of this world, what else really is more important than the salvation of the lost?

How should all that we do in this life influence the salvation of the lost? It is nice to talk about this ideal, but how do we live with this goal in mind?



Our life here is but a vapor (puff of smoke).

TUESDAY—AUGUST 7

TIMOTHY'S SUBSTITUTE VISIT (1 Thessalonians 3:1–5)

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1–5 and Matthew 24:9–22. In what larger picture does Paul see the sufferings of the Thessalonians and himself?

Paul is so anxious (worried) about his absence from the Thessalonians that he decides to sacrifice (give up) the companionship of Timothy in Athens. In this way, Paul can get

firsthand news of the Thessalonians' situation. His great desire for them leads him to prefer being without Timothy rather than being without news of how they are doing.

Timothy's mission is to be a substitute for Paul. So, Paul does his best to show support for Timothy's authority with the church. Timothy is Paul's "brother," a "minister of God," and a "coworker in the gospel" (NIV). Some Greek translations call Timothy a "coworker of God." This would be very high praise. But Paul knows that the mission will be a difficult one. And he does his best to open the way so that Timothy will be accepted as warmly as if Paul himself had come.

Verses 3 and 4 give us an idea of what Paul would have said to the Thessalonians if he had been able to visit them. The word that is chosen to describe their sufferings is common for end-time verses, such as in Matthew 24:9–22. Suffering should not come as a surprise. We all have been warned about it.

Christian suffering helps us to remember the events of the end. During that time, all true followers of Christ will face attacks and suffering (read Revelation 13:14–17). When suffering actually comes, we should be encouraged because Bible prophecy (end-time messages) is being fulfilled (completed). The purpose of prophecy is not to satisfy our curiosity about the future. It is to give solid hope for the future among the challenges we face every day.

In verse 5, Paul shows that he has an additional reason for sending

Timothy. Paul is worried that the difficult things the Thessalonians have experienced might have led to their loss of faith. He is worried that his mission to Thessalonica might somehow have ended in failure or without results.

What are things we can do, day by day, to prepare ourselves spiritually for troubles and suffering that may come in the future?

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 8

THE RESULT OF TIMOTHY'S VISIT (1 Thessalonians 3:6–10)

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6–8. Timothy was sent to encourage the Thessalonians. What parts of Timothy's report brought joy and encouragement to Paul? What did Timothy see in the Thessalonians that Paul thought was so good?

The “but now” of verse 6 is very important. Paul did not waste any time before sitting down to write to the Thessalonians. As soon as Paul got the news from Timothy, he wrote 1 Thessalonians.

What do we learn about Paul's prayer life from 1 Thessalonians 3:9, 10? What lesson can we learn from that for ourselves?

The absence of words like *always* (read 1 Thessalonians 1:2) suggests that there was something new in Paul's joy and thanksgiving. This is

beyond the usual joy and thanksgiving that he always felt when he prayed for the Thessalonians. The joy and thanksgiving in 1 Thessalonians 3:9, 10 show how Paul felt after receiving Timothy's news.

What was lacking in the Thessalonians' faith (1 Thessalonians 3:10)? This verse does not say. As we can see later, Paul's concern for their faith was more earthly than biblical. Chapters 4 and 5 show that the Thessalonians needed to show more faith in line with their belief. They had love and faith and were “standing firm [strong] in the Lord.” But it becomes clear later in the letter that they still needed to grow more in faith.

Why is prayer so important in our own walk with the Lord? How much time do you spend in prayer? What does your answer tell you about how important prayer is in your life? In what ways can you make your prayers stronger?

THURSDAY—AUGUST 9

PAUL'S RENEWED PRAYERS (1 Thessalonians 3:11–13)

The hope of the second coming of Jesus has great power to help our spiritual lives grow stronger. Every act of abuse or wrongdoing will be punished. Every act of love or kindness will be recognized and rewarded. (Read, for example, Matthew 10:42.) That means that every act in this life, no matter how small, has meaning in God's overall plan.

To Paul and ourselves, the greatest goal of the Second Coming will be a glorious (worthy of great praise) reunion of family and friends. These relationships will last forever because of what Jesus has done. Christian relationships do not come to an end. They are designed to last forever.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13. What are the things that Paul includes in his prayers for the Thessalonians after the arrival of Timothy?

First Thessalonians 3:11–13 sounds almost like the prayer at the end of a worship service. Of course, Paul wishes to return to Thessalonica and help with the problem of the church's faith (1 Thessalonians 3:10). But even if Paul is not able to return, he can still ask God to help the Thessalonians grow in faith and love for one another, their neighbors, and everyone they meet. This love will be an important part of their characters (who people are) when Jesus returns.

There is a puzzle in Paul's comment in verse 13 when he says that Jesus will come "with all his saints." The word *saints* or *holy ones* often refers to humans in the New Testament. But Second Coming verses in the New Testament normally describe Jesus with angels instead of humans (Matthew 24:30, 31; Mark 8:38; Mark 13:27). So, who are the "saints" in this verse?

The answer to this question is to recognize that in verse 13, Paul adopted the language of Zechariah

14:5 and used it to show the second coming of Jesus. The "holy ones" in the Old Testament are best understood as angels. (Read also Deuteronomy 33:2 and Daniel 7:10.) But the New Testament gives the word *saints* new meaning. They are humans who have righteousness from Jesus. But, in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, Paul uses the Old Testament meaning of the word *saints* as angels who stand with God. As such, the angels will come with the God-man Jesus when He returns to earth.



Christian relationships do not have a deadline. They are designed to last forever.

FRIDAY—AUGUST 10

ADDITIONAL STUDY: "The arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia during Paul's stay in Corinth, had greatly cheered the apostle. The two men brought him good news about the 'faith and charity [love]' of those who had accepted the truth in Thessalonica. Paul's heart went out in gentle mercy toward these believers who had remained true to God in spite of troubles and suffering." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 255.

"True, heaven-born love is not self-

ish and changeable. It is not dependent on human praise. The heart of a person who receives the grace² of God overflows with love for God and for those for whom Christ died. He is not looking for honor. He does not love others because they love and please him or because they think he is good. Instead, he loves them because they belong to Christ. If his reasons, words, or actions are misunderstood, he does not feel insulted. Instead, he continues to treat them with the same kindness and love. He is kind and thoughtful and humble. But he still is full of hope, always trusting in the mercy and love of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 101, 102.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ In *Christ’s Object Lessons* (in Friday’s study), and in many other places, Ellen G. White uses the wording “souls for whom Christ died.” How widely should that wording be used? For every human on earth? Or only for fellow believers in Christ? If Christ truly died for all, then why are not all saved?

❷ How important is a past relationship when it comes to giving advice or criticism to a fellow believer? What can we learn about this from Paul’s example in this week’s verses? What can we learn from this that can help us in our ministry to others?

❸ Paul’s love and concern for the believers in Thessalonica is so easily seen. This love reflects the love that Jesus showed when He was here on earth as a Man. Love is such a powerful force in softening hearts and opening people up to the grace of God. How can we learn to love others more than we already do? How can we better learn to show that love too?

SUMMARY: In 1 Thessalonians 2:13–3:13, Paul describes the events and emotions (deep feeling) of the period between the time he left Thessalonica and when Timothy arrives in Corinth with news about the church. The important point of the chapter is Paul’s deep bond (connection) with the Thessalonian believers.

2. grace—God’s gift of mercy that He gives us to take away our sins.