

1 and 2 Thessalonians
Friends Forever (1 Thess. 2:13-3:13)

Lesson #6 for August 11, 2012

Scriptures: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13; Romans 9:1-5; 11:1-12,24-32; Matthew 24:9-22; 10:42.

1. In this section of 1 Thessalonians, we see Paul pouring out his heart in prayer that his close friends in Thessalonica would not be discouraged and give up because of Paul's absence or even because of the persecution that they were facing. Paul reminded them that their friendship, even though it was established over such a short period of time, was supposed to last forever. Paul called his letter, "God's message." (1 Thessalonians 2:13)
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16; Acts 7:57-8:1. No doubt, when he entered Thessalonica covered with bruises and wounds, Paul knew that it was likely that his soon-to-be Thessalonian friends might someday face a similar plight. He reminded them of what happened in Jerusalem after the speech and stoning of Stephen. (Acts 7) No doubt, that experience was burned into the memory of Paul. He had been a consenting participant to that stoning! If you had been a part of the stoning of Stephen, would it be easier for you to remain faithful despite persecution? Or, harder? How would you feel about inviting people to become Christians knowing they might soon suffer that kind of persecution? Why is it that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"? When the church becomes popular, its growth slows to a crawl! Why is that?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16. When he traveled from Philippi to Thessalonica, Paul knew that it would not be long before his enemies back in Philippi would hear of what was happening in Thessalonica. He knew that there were people following him around the Mediterranean world trying to do everything possible to counteract his work. Why do you think those people were so determined to undo Paul's work? Who supported them as they went around trying to force people to be circumcised and to follow all of the other Jewish requirements?
4. Paul was not trying to condemn all Jews. Paul himself was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin. (Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5) All of the early disciples and apostles were Jews. We need to remember that every person alive on planet earth is a son or daughter of God for whom He would have been willing to die if that person were the only person in the world to accept Christ. If we truly recognize that, does it affect our witnessing? Does it affect how we treat other people? Are we still hindered in our outreach by racial and ethnic prejudices?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20. In this passage Paul was reminding his Thessalonian friends of their experiences together. He wanted them to understand that even though he was forced to leave the city, he still felt the same about them. He would have loved to have been able to visit them again. Furthermore, in 1 Thessalonians 4 & 5, he offered some advice and counsel, and he wanted them to understand that he did so with the deepest love and concern for their well-being.
6. The Jews of Thessalonica stirred up so much trouble that Paul had to leave the city. Was Satan indeed behind that action? How was Satan involved? There are not many verses in the Bible that speak directly about Satan's activity. What should we learn from this verse?
7. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that he still felt about them as if he were an orphaned child torn away from them, his parents.

8. However, Paul was not discouraged and had no intention of giving up. He had a longer range view—a larger view—of the issues in the great controversy. He expected someday fairly soon after that to meet his Thessalonian friends in the kingdom of heaven—even perhaps having an opportunity to boast about them to Jesus Himself. (1 John 2:18)
9. Do you think it would be appropriate for us to be proud of those we have helped to enter the kingdom? This life is nothing more than a fleeting vapor. (James 4:14) It amounts to essentially nothing in comparison to life eternal. But, how much time do we spend on preparation for and living our very short lives here in contrast to preparation for eternal life? Do we have our priorities straight?
10. When Timothy arrived in Athens, Paul almost immediately thought it was necessary to send him back to Thessalonica to see how his new Christian converts were doing. Do you think Paul will be surprised to know that for thousands of years people around the world have been studying his private correspondence with the Thessalonians?
11. Paul was very worried that things might be going badly in Thessalonica. So, he was willing to part with Timothy for a period of time to learn of their fate.
12. Notice the words Paul used to describe his friend, Timothy. (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5) Despite Timothy's young age, Paul described him as a “brother,” a “minister of God,” and a “coworker in the gospel.”
13. Having seen Paul perhaps bruised and wounded when he arrived in Thessalonica, the Thessalonians should not have been too surprised that they were suffering persecution. Read Revelation 13:14-17; John 13:19; 14:29. We have been warned multiple times about the deceit, trickery, even persecution that is coming in the future. What do you think will happen? Do you think the day might come when someone in your church or even your Sabbath school class will be imprisoned because of his/her beliefs? Or even killed? How would that impact your Sabbath activities? Would you dare to have a picnic in the park? Or, would you be hiding in the hills? Will the worst of things happen in the cities? Are we adequately prepared for such an eventuality? Paul was very concerned that the Thessalonians might have become discouraged and even started to lose their faith. He thought it was essential to send Timothy back immediately.
14. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10. When Timothy returned, the report he brought was a great encouragement to Paul. Their faith and love were still strong. They were thinking about and praying for Paul just as he was praying for them. They were hoping that he would be able to return to Thessalonica sometime soon. Paul assured them that there was nothing he would rather have done. (1 Thessalonians 3:9,10)
15. What is the role of intercessory prayer? If we pray for someone we cannot visit or talk to directly, does it make any difference that we pray for him/her? In the setting of the great controversy, can God do things Christians are praying for and asking Him to do which He could not do if they were not praying for it? How do our prayers impact the interaction between God and Satan? Does the book of Job help in any way? Or, does it make things worse? (Compare Zechariah 3:1-5)
16. When you pray, do you feel like you are having a conversation with God? Do you think of Him as a personal Friend? God is everywhere. We need to practice His presence. Compare your prayers with the conversations you might have with a very close human friend. When you talk to God, are you just asking Him for things you think you need? Or, are you talking to Him just because you enjoy talking to Him?

17. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that the second coming of Jesus Christ is a powerful incentive. Everything we do, even everything we think, will be brought up in the judgment which is taking place right now. (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; Revelation 20:12,13) We might be more inclined to think of these verses in a negative way; but, God promises that we will be rewarded for every good thing we do as well. (Matthew 10:42)
18. More than that, the second coming will be a glorious “family” reunion. Imagine what it will be like to talk to people right down through history from Adam to Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Daniel, etc. And think of all the people whose names we do not know who will have interesting stories to talk about.
19. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. Paul was praying that his prayers would increase the Thessalonians’ love and strength and that the result would be holiness and perfection.
20. Read John 13:35. This verse has some incredible implications. If we actually learned to love in a Christian (*agape*) way, does that recognizably set us apart from the world? Do people of the world do things based on a loving motive? Or, are all their motives ultimately selfish?

True, heaven-born love is not selfish and changeable. It is not dependent on human praise. The heart of him who receives the grace [102] of God overflows with love for God and for those for whom Christ died. Self is not struggling for recognition. He does not love others because they love and please him, because they appreciate his merits, but because they are Christ's purchased possession. If his motives, words, or actions are misunderstood or misrepresented, he takes no offense, but pursues the even tenor of his way. He is kind and thoughtful, humble in his opinion of himself, yet full of hope, always trusting in the mercy and love of God.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pages 101.3-102.0.

21. Have you often seen that kind of love manifested in your own life or in the lives of other Christians that you know? Have you ever seen it in someone of the world?
22. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:13. There are some wide variations in how the final phrase of this verse is translated. Will Christ be bringing the saints back with Him from heaven? Or, is it the angels that He is bringing with Him? (Matthew 24:30,31; Mark 8:38; 13:27) It is very likely that Paul was thinking of Zechariah 14:5 where “the holy ones” are clearly a reference to angels. (Compare Deuteronomy 33:2; Daniel 7:9,10)
23. Did Christ die only for the benefit of human sinners? In what sense did Christ’s death impact the entire universe? (Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19,20) When we get to heaven, what will we have to say to the angels about the great controversy and our role in it? What will they have to say to us?
24. Does the death of Christ make it possible for every person who has ever lived to be saved if they choose to do so? How has that love impacted you personally?
25. What role should thinking about our eternal home in heaven play in our day-to-day thinking and activities? Christians have been accused of focusing on “pie in the sky, bye and bye”! Is that a good thing? Or, is it a bad thing? Should we constantly live our lives with the recognition that we are living not just for time but for eternity?
26. The relatively small group of new believers in Thessalonica had been called to be a part of the larger Christian church. Paul had very clear ideas of how that church body was supposed to function. (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:1-16)

27. The first church in Jerusalem functioned almost like a commune. They ate together. They spent their time together. They witnessed together. Might that kind of community be a part of the final church at the end of this earth's history? Are we building the kind of relationships with our fellow Christian church members that might prepare us for that? Are we practicing *agape* love?
28. There is plenty of evidence that human beings need love. In a previous lesson, we talked about how Friedrich, the Holy Roman Emperor in the 13th century, carried out an experiment to see what language children would speak if they were never given any human touch or language cues. It resulted in the deaths of the children at a very young age. Similar studies have been done on monkeys. (See Harry F. Harlow, *et al.*, "Total Social Isolation in Monkeys," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 54, number 1 (1965), pages 90,92,94.
29. Surely, Christians should not be surprised at this given what God said very early to Adam in the Garden of Eden in that perfect environment. God said, "It is not good for the man to live alone." (Genesis 2:18, *GNB*)
30. We do not see people living in Western civilizations with obvious demon possession. Why do you think that is? Surely, we do not believe the Devil has gone on vacation! So, what is his role at this time in history? Does Zechariah 3:1-5 help us to understand what he is doing? Is Satan directly involved somehow in the pre-advent judgment? (Daniel 7:9,10)
31. Paul was so concerned about the Thessalonians that he was willing to send Timothy back there despite having to stay in Athens by himself. There were three main things that he wanted Timothy to accomplish: 1) Most of all, he wanted to affirm and confirm the faith of the Thessalonians. 2) He wanted to encourage them and to remind them that they were not alone and that Paul and his companions loved them and wished they could be with them in the difficult times they were facing. 3) Paul was very anxious to find out how they were doing in his absence. Are we just as caring and concerned about those who become new members in our church family as Paul was about the Thessalonians? What would Paul say to Christians today?

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