

1 Thessalonians 2

Sharing the gospel despite the opposition – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

1. What do you remember from the last study we did?

What does the passage say and mean?

60 minutes

Explain to the group that after the events of Acts 17, Paul travelled on to Athens, and Timothy went back to Thessalonica. Paul left 'instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible', Acts 17:15, and they all met up again in Corinth, from where the letters to the Thessalonian church were written. However, Timothy brought worrying news to Paul, about which Paul wrote to the Thessalonians.

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6, 10, 14-18. What rumours / problems had Timothy mentioned to Paul?

Rumours:

- *That Paul's visit had been a failure, v1.*
- *That Paul's message had been wrong or had been an attempt to trick them, v3.*
- *That they were working for their own ends, not God's glory, v4-6.*
- *That Paul's behaviour had been inappropriate, v10.*

Problems:

- *Persecution, v14-16.*
- *Paul and co desperately wanted to visit again, but were prevented, v17-18.*

3. Read v1 again. Think back to what you learnt in Chapter 1. How do we know that Paul's visit was not a failure?

- *They had shared the gospel and people had believed*
- *A church had formed, and still existed despite persecution*

- *The Thessalonian Christians were working, labouring and enduring for Christ (1:3)*
- *People had changed and others could see it (1:6-9)*
- *Paul was still hearing very good reports from others about the Thessalonian church, including that they are waiting for Jesus' return (so they still believe the gospel!) (1:8)*

4. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:2 and Acts 16:13-34 out to the group.

What had happened in Philippi?

vv13-15 – Paul preached the gospel and a woman called Lydia believed. She and her household became the first European church!

vv16-24 – Paul and Silas were dragged in front of the authorities after Paul had cast out an evil spirit from a slave girl. They end up in jail.

vv25-34 – God miraculously frees them from jail, although they don't actually leave. Rather they share the gospel with their jailer and his family.

*5. Paul, Silas and Timothy went from Philippi to Thessalonica. Can you remember what happened in Thessalonica?

(Try to do this from memory. If necessary, read out Acts 17:1-9 again).

Some people had believed the gospel message, but others had rounded up a mob and caused a riot, ending up with Jason and other Christians being arrested and then bailed. Paul and Silas had to be smuggled out at night to another city, but the Thessalonian mob followed them.

*6. **STICKERS** Why do you think they put themselves through the whole thing again?

Either Paul and co hadn't learned from their mistakes or their message was so important that they would risk everything to get it out there...

*7. Why were they able to continue to share the gospel, despite strong opposition? (v2)

Because they were doing it with the help of God, not in their own strength. Therefore they had the courage to share the gospel even though they knew that the consequences to themselves could be disastrous (they've just been imprisoned, released and smuggled out of a city).

*8. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:3. How do we know that v3 is true today?

Time for some apologetics! Work through the answer to this yourself before you facilitate the group. Try to let the group do most of the talking, and offer just some of the following yourself. Please make sure that you include verses 4-6 in the discussion.

Consider:

- *The internal consistency of Scripture*
- *Scripture is God's revealed word*
- *The historical facts are backed up by contemporary secular documents*

- *It rings true*
- *God said it!*
- *In what way is the gospel trying to trick you? What is the trick?*
- *What are the impure motives? Who gains by selling such a story if it's not true?*
- *Can so many people over so many years be so deceived? Billions of people have believed the gospel and built their lives on it.*
- *Verse 4-6!*

Etc.

Don't worry if you don't come to a conclusion. It's not about convincing people that the gospel is true, it's about getting them to think about the possibility that v3 might be true. Sometimes it's best to leave a discussion open-ended, with people still thinking about it as they leave the room.

***9. Read v6b-9. What can we learn from Paul and co about evangelism?**

Paul didn't burst into a situation, discharge the gospel and leave. They lived among the community and became one with them. They cared for the Thessalonians (and everyone else they visited), didn't want to be a financial burden on them (tent-making, v9) and shared their lives among them. As apostles of Christ, they could have demanded certain treatment or respect or income, but they didn't. They cared for the community as if they were their children, who had become dear to them, likening themselves to a mother.

***10. Read v10. Why is our behaviour so important, as witnesses for Jesus?**

NB Don't let anyone think that they are not sharing the gospel, so their behaviour doesn't matter! Although we are not all called to be evangelists, we all have a responsibility to share the gospel when we have the opportunity. We all have a unique front-line into the world – e.g. prisoners can talk to and live amongst people on the wings, which we can't do.

- *We are called to follow Jesus – this involves living our lives his way, not our own way. John 14:23, 'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.' This is a promise, not a threat!*
- *When people see behaviour that is not honouring to God, they see hypocrisy. When they see hypocrisy in those who claim to follow Jesus, they are likely to discount Jesus' whole message.*

11. Read v11-12. What do you think had happened while Paul was at Thessalonica? Why was this important?

The words used are 'encouraging, comforting and urging', as a father to his children – it sounds like Paul had to discipline some of the Christians. Paul has just said that his own behaviour was blameless, so he wasn't being a hypocrite. He had the authority (as Apostle, church leader and fellow Christian) to discipline those believers who were not following Christ. (Note: you can be a believer and not a follower – so is the gospel really making a difference in your life? 1:6)

This is important because it does matter how we behave. Again, John 14:23, our obedience (/ genuine attempt at obedience) to Christ reflects our love for him. If we want to follow Christ, then we should submit to the authority of other Christians regarding our behaviour, as we recognise that they are helping us to

follow Christ. (In this we need discernment and understanding of what Scripture says about the issue – we should not submit to someone who has misunderstood the Bible!).

12. Read v13. How did the Thessalonian believers know that the gospel was the word of God, and not made up by men?

Acts 17:2 – Paul had reasoned with them from the Scriptures (our OT), and when he had explained what the Scriptures said about the coming Christ, and explained about Jesus, he had linked the two together, to show that Jesus was the one who fulfilled all the prophecies.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 – the Thessalonians have experienced the power of God to save and change them, so their own experience tells them that it is not made up by men.

*13. How do we know that the Gospel is the word of God, and not the word of men?

Apologetics again! Let the group talk it through and then throw in some of the following if you need to:

- *2 Timothy 3:16 – the whole Bible is God's word, given to people to write down*
- *Internal consistency of Scripture – it all ties together. The word of men is likely to end up contradicting itself or not fulfilling its own prophecy*
- *People died for it then, and continue to die for it now. Thus they believe that it is worth dying for – that it really is God's word, God's truth.*
- *2000 years after the man called Jesus was killed, we're still talking about it...*

*14. Read v14-15. How long have God's people been persecuted for?

Since before Jesus' time! The prophets were persecuted and killed for their unwavering belief in God. Let the group discuss why this should be the case.

*15. Why do you think the gospel causes such different reactions of trust and opposition?

The gospel is offensive because it tells us that we are sinners – we are not good and we don't deserve eternal life. Those who hear it and believe are those who surrender to God. Those who reject the gospel are those who react against it.

16. Read v17-19. How does Paul feel about the believers in Thessalonica and why do you think this is?

He loves them dearly. Not only are they his brothers and sisters in Christ, but he treated them as his own children, v11, when he was with them. He is genuinely concerned about what happens to them, even though he is not with them at the moment. He says that they are his glory and joy in Christ.

How can I live according to these truths in my life?

20 minutes

1. What is your reaction to the gospel? Do you surrender to it completely, surrender to the parts that you find comfortable, or reject it?

Try to help people to understand that it's possible to accept the parts of the gospel that we like, but reject or ignore the parts we don't like – the bits about suffering and surrendering everything as we follow Jesus.

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:10 again. In what ways does your behaviour not match up to following Jesus? What needs to change and how are you going to do this?

Make sure that the answers are all related to self, and that there is no criticism of others in the room.

In every situation, what needs to change is not so much our attempts to behave (this can become a work, rather than living by grace), but surrendering whatever the problem behaviour is to Jesus and asking him to help us to live his way, rather than just trying harder to fix it ourselves.

For your own understanding, see Galatians 5:16-18 – living by the Spirit versus the sinful nature – but don't read this out to the group, it'll confuse them at the end of a session.

It's a work of grace that we change, although we do have responsibility to pull our own socks up!

3. Do you experience opposition to your faith or to the gospel when you share it? How do you handle this?

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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