

Fact Sheet for **“Criticized for Your Faith”**
1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13

Pastor Bob Singer
11/13/2016

None of us like to be criticized for our faith, but it will happen. The question is, “How will you respond?”

ESV 2:13 ¶ **And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.**

“You believers” can more literally be translated “you who believe”. You see “believe” here has an active, ongoing sense to it.

The “word of God” clearly refers to the message spoken by Paul and Silas. That word came to the Thessalonians in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (1:5). When the Thessalonians heard it they realized that these words were indeed from God and not merely from the wisdom of Paul and Silas. Paul went to Athens and then Corinth from Thessalonica. Read what he wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

Now we don’t have apostles today but we have the written word of God. And it is at work in us who believe.

¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵ who (1) killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and (2) drove us out, and (3) displease God and (4) oppose all mankind ¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved-- so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

Be careful about the term “Jews” here. When the church first began it was a Jewish church. Jesus Himself, the apostles, the 3,000 who were saved on Pentecost Sunday and the 5,000 individuals who got saved soon afterwards were overwhelmingly Jewish. The salvation of Cornelius in Acts 10 was a watershed in the spread of the gospel. The gospel had gone beyond the Jewish community and was now spreading among the Gentiles. At the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 it was decided that these new Gentile believers did not need to become Jewish. The problem Paul had was not with the Jews in general but with the unbelieving Jews who were actively opposed to the gospel. And remember, Paul used to be one of them.

Consider what God thinks of those who actively try to silence the gospel in our community.

What did Paul mean by filling up the measure of their sins? Read Genesis 15:13-16 for an example. What wrath has come upon them has had a lot of debate. Is it the destruction of the temple almost 20 years later? Is it similar to the unforgiveable sin? Is it their punishment in eternity? In any case Paul was emphasizing the seriousness of hindering the preaching of the gospel.

¹⁷ ¶ But since we were torn away (literally “were orphaned”) from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, again and again-- but Satan hindered us.

As I mentioned last Sunday this shows Paul’s pastoral heart.

It’s not hard to surmise that there were some people in Thessalonica who were questioning or criticizing Paul’s conduct. Have you ever wondered how Paul knew that Satan hindered him and Silas? I don’t, but

he clearly did. John Calvin wrote, “Whenever the ungodly cause us trouble, they are fighting under the banner of Satan, and are his instruments for harassing us”.

Paul mentioned himself by name here to emphasize that he himself felt this way.

¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

Who have you had a ministry with? Do you feel this about them?

^{3:1} ¶ Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ^{3a} that no one be moved by these afflictions.

“Exhort” can also be translated “encourage.” When you have spoken to people about the gospel what kind of push-back have you gotten on occasion? We usually don’t get dragged before the courts, imprisoned, or run out of town... but we do pay an emotional price when we are passionately criticized. How has this affected you? The word translated “moved” was originally used of a dog wagging its tail, then by those deluded by flattery, and figuratively of those moved or shaken.

^{3b} For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.

Remember that while Paul was still blind from his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus God said to Ananias (Acts 9:15).

⁵ For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

Paul was concerned that Satan, using affliction, may have weakened their faith or sown the seeds of doubt in them.

⁶ ¶ But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you-- ⁷ for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. ⁸ For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. ⁹ For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

The force of Paul’s words is that they could not thank God enough for them.

And now a benediction of sorts...

¹¹ ¶ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

There is certainly severe affliction for Christians in various parts of the world. The affliction we experience in Cottage Grove may be overt or it may be subtle, but we still do experience it. Take stock of your faith. How do you respond when you are under attack or feel that you might be? Do you feel like you should grow quieter and stay in the background? Or are you encouraged?