

# 1 Thessalonians

## I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 2:17-20** . . . But we (*Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy*), brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. [18] For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us. [19] For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? [20] For you are our glory and joy.

## B. Pray

## II. 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

A. [17] Paul begins this section by saying that being separated from the Thessalonian believers made him all the more eager with great desire to be with them.

1. The words, “all the more eager with great desire” is an interesting phrase. To say it another way, Paul was “extremely eager to satisfy a strong longing that was still unsatisfied.”
2. Have you ever had or do you currently have an unsatisfied strong longing that you are eager to satisfy? Probably. But the more important question for today is: “Do you have a strong longing that though it is satisfied now and then, it is never satisfied enough for you to be continually content?”
3. For those of you who have identified a strong desire that, for you, too often goes unsatisfied and therefore leaves you often feeling discontent, I have this question: “How do you think, and how do you feel, and how do you behave when your desire goes unsatisfied?”
4. It is not uncommon for people like us to have strong longings for things, experiences, or people that are selfish, immoral, spiritually unhealthy, and relationship destructive, or that feed distrust of God and get in the way of seeking God and godly living.
5. However, because Paul’s great longing to be with the Thessalonian believers was a good, spiritually healthy longing, I want to present some good, spiritually healthy longings spoken of in scripture for the purpose of encouraging you to make them your own. And the scriptures I’ve selected for this use the word “pursue,” which is an activity best driven by a longing on our part.

- a. **Proverbs 21:21**, “He who pursues righteousness and loyalty finds life, righteousness and honor.”
  - (1) We are not born with a natural longing to put in the effort required to pursue righteousness and loyalty. But once we know such pursuits are good, we can choose to act as if we long for them, and in doing so develop and feed heartfelt longings that compel us to pursue these two qualities.
  - (2) If pleasing God and loving others are not yet compelling reasons in themselves to begin pursuing righteousness and loyalty as a act of the will, let the payoff motivate you – life, righteousness, and honor – because they are of great value, not only in this life, but in the one to come.
- b. **Matthew 5:6**, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”
  - (1) This is similar to **Proverbs 21:21**. And though you may not currently feel driven to pursue righteousness as if you hunger and thirst for it, you can decide to act as if you do.
  - (2) And if you do this, you will in time gain a strong longing that wells up from within and no longer needs an act of your will to drive you toward being satisfied.
- c. **2 Timothy 2:22**, “Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”
  - (1) This truth works best when the fleeing part is driven by a strong, inward longing just like the pursuing part. Why? Because your youthful lusts or immature desires act like anchors holding you back from moving forward in the pursuit of righteousness, faith, love and peace.
  - (2) And here again, you may not have a great, compelling desire for either side of this truth, but you do have the intelligence to know what you ought to do. Therefore, if you will act as if you had a strong longing for fleeing and pursuing, you will find that in time the strong desires will come from within and be with you all day every day.
- d. **Hebrews 12:14**, “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.”
  - (1) To make an honest, godly effort to pursue peace with all men requires a way of thinking, and a set of values and beliefs that make God your primary source of security. Such changes in thinking, values, and beliefs often begin with an

act of the will that grows into a compelling longing to please God, to love your neighbor as yourself, and to progressively be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ.

(2) And of course, the same is true for the pursuit of sanctification.

e. **Romans 14:19.** “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”

(1) I’ve included this verse because the end of it exhorts us to pursue the things that make for building up one another.

(2) It is possible you have, at times, had a longing to be a part of a caring, supportive, encouraging community.

(3) But here, Paul is exhorting us to pursue those things that enable us to actively care for, support, and encourage others in our church community.

(4) And so I ask, do you have a longing to build up one another in our church so that together we are continuing to move toward God and godliness?

6. I am certain each of us is aware, or we could be aware of unhealthy, ungodly, selfish desires that rise up within when not satisfied. And we should deal with them. But today I am urging you to choose and nurture those longings that move you toward God, a growing godliness, and a spiritually healthy church.

B. [18] For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—**and yet Satan hindered us.**

1. Satan is God’s arch enemy, and as such he is committed to damaging God’s reputation, diminishing God’s kingdom, and stealing, killing, and destroying every human being who has been and will be born on this earth so that God cannot have the children and the love He seeks from mankind.

2. The name Satan means **accuser** or **adversary**. An adversary is someone who turns against and is hostile toward someone else with the intent of opposing or resisting them in order to defeat them. The descriptive labels **accuser** and **adversary** appear in the following scriptures.

a. **Revelation 12:10**, “Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the **accuser** of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.’”

- b. **1 Peter 5:8**, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your **adversary**, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”
  - c. The name **Satan** appears 53 times in the Bible – 18 times in the OT and 35 times in the NT.
3. Though Paul says Satan hindered him and his co-workers from returning to Thessalonica, he does not say how Satan hindered them. We could speculate, but that might lead to conclusions that are not biblically sound or accurate. However, we do know that Satan is active in our world – as seen in the following scriptures.
- a. **1 Thessalonians 3:5**, “For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the **tempter** might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.”
    - (1) Satan was active as the “tempter” in **Matthew 4:3**.
  - b. Satan is referred to as a thief in **John 10:10**, “The **thief** comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”
  - c. **John 12:30-31**, Jesus answered and said, “This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. [31] Now judgment is upon this world; now the **ruler of this world** will be cast out.”
    - (1) Satan is also identified as the “ruler of this world” in **John 14:30; 16:11**.
  - d. **2 Thessalonians 3:3**, “But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the **evil one**.”
    - (1) Satan is also called the “evil one” in **Matthew 13:19,38; John 17:15; Ephesians 6:16; 1 John 2:13,14; 3:13; 5:18,19**.
  - e. **2 Corinthians 4:3-4**, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, [4] in whose case the **god of this world** has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”
  - f. **Ephesians 6:10-13**, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. [11] Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the **devil**. [12] For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. [13] Therefore, take up the full armor of God,

so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

(1) The label **devil** appears 34 times in the Bible, all in the NT.

(2) And whether he is referred to as Satan, the tempter, the ruler of this world, the god of this world, the evil one, the accuser, our adversary, or the thief, he is active in our world, using his skills and power to defeat and destroy us.

4. However, we do not have to be defeated or destroyed by Satan once we have become God’s children and followers of Jesus Christ. The Bible presents some specific ways we can resist the devil’s temptations and survive his evil, deceptive schemes.

a. **Matthew 26:41**, “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

b. **Ephesians 6:10-13**, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. [11] **Put on** the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. [12] For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. [13] Therefore, **take up** the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

c. **Ephesians 6:16**, “In addition . . . **take up** the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

d. **1 Peter 5:9**, “But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”

(1) Are you convinced (*faith*) that God will not allow you to be tempted beyond your current ability to resist, and that with each temptation He provides a workable way for you to escape unharmed (**1 Corinthians 10:13**)? Do you believe this means the devil no longer has power over you so that you no longer have to sin?

(2) Do you believe that Christ’s death has broken the enslaving power of sin over you and freed you to live like Him in this world (**Romans 6**)?

(3) Are you convinced (*faith*) that God has made available to you everything necessary for life and godliness – and has

given you wonderful promises that enable you to become a partaker of His nature (**2 Peter 1:3-4**)?

- e. **Ephesians 4:26-27**, “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, [27] and do not give the devil an opportunity.”
    - (1) The danger of anger is that it opens a door for us to respond selfishly and sinfully rather than lovingly and godly. And once we open that door, we give the devil an opportunity to guide our anger into pride, an unjust use of power, abusive speech, or feelings of discouragement and despair.
    - (2) Therefore, Paul warns us to keep that door closed – not by never being angry, but by never letting our anger lead us into sinful thoughts, words, or actions.
  - f. **James 4:7b**, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” It is my opinion that we are wise to use the same method of resisting the devil that Jesus used – quoting scripture when tempted.
5. Sometimes we blame the devil and his co-workers for more than they have done or are doing. This kind of misplaced blame is dealt with in **James 1:13-15**, “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. [14] But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by **his own** lust. [15] Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”
- C. [19] For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? [20] For you are our glory and joy.
- 1. Paul believes he will have great joy at the return of Christ because the godly lives these Thessalonians are living will be the reason, or at least one of the reasons he will be rewarded with a crown and with praise.
  - 2. For Paul to rationally and realistically believe he would receive a crown and praise at Christ’s return, three things had to be true.
    - a. **First**, Paul could not be looking for earthly rewards, such as (1) large crowds, (2) recognition as a successful missionary, pastor, or bestselling author, (3) having the power of an apostle, or (4) financial gain beyond what he needed.
    - b. The **second** thing that had to be true is that Paul could not just be concerned about the conversion of these Thessalonians, he

had to also be concerned about the spiritual health of each believer and the church as a whole. And his concern for their conversion and spiritual well-being had to preclude any concern he might have for the cost to himself of working toward that end.

- c. And the **third** thing that had to be true is that these believers had to take their conversion, their faith in God, and their pursuit of a godly life seriously enough to listen intently and to intentionally put into practice what they were being taught.
- d. The reality is, the reward and praise Paul was looking forward to is based on what the Thessalonian believers did with what Paul had done.

### III. Conclusion

- A. Now you may be wondering what these three truths have to do with us.
  1. Paul's mindset about ministry, attitude toward ministry, and goal of ministry ought to be an example of what my mindset, attitude, and goal of ministry should be.
  2. The Thessalonian's response to Paul's efforts on their behalf is an example of what I am hoping and praying your response will be to my efforts on your behalf.
  3. Finally, if I remain faithful to God and what He has given me to do, and if anyone responds to my ministry like the Thessalonians responded to Paul's ministry, then they would become my joy and crown and praise at the return of Christ.