

Persecution and Joy

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

Paul thanks the Thessalonians for being receptive to God's Word and persevering under the persecution that resulted from their life change. He expresses joy and encouragement from knowing how they are honoring God. We are challenged to live in a way that will bring real change to our community by receiving God's Word, suffering well, living to honor Jesus, and preparing to receive his reward.

Application

1. Paul recognized life change among the Thessalonians as evidence of an open and receptive posture toward God's Word. What is an example of how being open to biblical truth has resulted in life change for you? Would you describe your posture toward God's Word currently as stagnant or receptive? What evidence do you have?
2. Although the persecution we face as Christians today in our culture looks different than that suffered by almost all believers throughout history, it is still true that followers of Christ will suffer for his sake. How have you witnessed or experienced suffering as a result of orienting your life around the truth of Scripture? When have you been faced with a decision to stand with the Scriptures even though it may have meant negative consequences? How did (or will you) respond?
3. Read Romans 5:8-10. Accepting the idea of God's wrath is difficult for some believers. The root of God's anger is his holiness because it's been violated. How have you historically thought about God's righteous anger? Why is acknowledging God's anger critical to understanding the gospel? How does that impact you personally?

4. The Thessalonians were an encouragement to Paul and to other believers everywhere. How we live affects other people as an encouragement or discouragement. What is your reaction to the thought that your life is no longer yours but God's? Matt mentioned many areas that principle affects: kids, job, marriage, future, attitude, reputation, education, money, time, etc. In what area and in what practical way do you need to respond to that truth?

Key Points

- Paul demonstrates vulnerability in his letter. Vulnerability and emotional availability is important in order to have influence.
- Life change is evidence of an open and receptive posture toward God's Word.
- If you are going to follow Christ, you are going to suffer for him.
- God's holiness is the root of his anger. That wrath was coming for me, but Jesus stepped in and absorbed it in my place.
- We live in a world with an evil one who is trying to destroy us. We must acknowledge that spiritual warfare is real but stay away from the extremes of dismissing the demonic world or attributing all difficulty to it.
- If you are a follower of Christ, your life is no longer yours but God's, and how you live affects other people.

Scripture References

Romans 5:8-10 (NIV)