

2Thessalonians, Chapter One, Lesson One

ENLARGED FAITH 2Thessalonians 1:1-4

STIMULATE

** It is good to be together again for the express purpose of studying the Word of God. Last week we enjoyed our final study in 1Thessalonians and I hope that you have drawn closer to the Lord through an increased understanding of that epistle.

Our lives are transformed by the renewing of our minds through the study of God's word (Romans 12:2) and our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ becomes more valuable to us as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord (2Peter 3:18).

MOTIVATE

** Today we are beginning our study of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, which will bless our time together over the next eight weeks. In the opening four verses, the apostle begins to encourage these Thessalonians (and us as well) by showing them the impact of their "**Enlarged Faith**". We would do well to learn from their example, that our faith may grow to the glory of God. Let's read our passage together, as we prepare our hearts for the Word of God.

Read passage (V.1-4)

Opening Prayer

Enlarged Faith

INVESTIGATE

** What do you recall about the time and circumstances of Paul's first letter to these same Thessalonians?

1. Written by Paul around 50 A.D.
2. Written from the city of Corinth
3. While Paul was on his second missionary journey
4. Even though this was a new church, Paul was commending them on their witness, love for each other and stressing the need to follow his instruction on some specific issues in their life.

V. 1 ** Before we consider Paul's opening comments for today, we need to tie down some basic information regarding this second letter. When was it written?

Probably only a few weeks to a few months after his first letter.

** What were some of the main reasons for Paul to write this amazing letter?

1. In response to the reports he had been getting about the Thessalonians. He wanted to express his gratitude to God for them. cf. 2Thessalonians 1:3 and 2:13
2. To calm the hearts of those who were confused about "the day of Lord" and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. cf. 2Thessalonians 2:1-2, 8

3. To grant them comfort by reminding them of God's justice and His judgement of the wicked.
cf. 2Thessalonians 1:7-9

4. To give the Thessalonian church specific instruction as to how they should lovingly deal with "undisciplined" believers who were taking advantage of Christian charity.
cf. 2Thessalonians 3:11

** Take a moment and compare verse one of today's passage with the opening of 1Thessalonians. Do you see the subtle, yet important difference?

In this second letter, Paul shifts his emphasis from "God the Father" to "God our Father". He had given specific instruction to bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he wrote to the believers in Ephesus and Corinth. cf. 2Corinthians 1:3 and Ephesians 1:3

** How would the use of "our Father" make the Thessalonians feel about their relationship with the apostle?

Because they all had the same Heavenly Father, they were truly one in Christ. Paul was using this term to personally identify with the believers there in Thessalonica.

V. 2 ** When you look into verse two of our passage, what other difference do you see from verse one in 1Thessalonians?

After "Grace to you and peace", Paul adds "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ".

** Is that indicating that "Grace and peace" come from two different sources?

No - They can only come from one source, God Himself. The preposition "in" used in verse one to describe the proximity of the Thessalonian church indicates that the two are one. Their saving faith was placed "in" God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as a single point of worship.

Similarly, the blessings of God (grace and peace) are from a single source. cf. John 14:8-9

V. 3 ** As we move into the main portion of this brief passage, how do you think Paul feels about giving thanks to God for these Thessalonians?

"We ought always..." Paul is joyfully obligated to give thanks to God, who brought about the saving faith of these Thessalonians.

KJV - "We are bound to thank God always for you..."

Amplified Version - "We ought and indeed are obligated as those in debt to give thanks always to God for you..."

The Living Bible - "Dear brothers, giving thanks to God for you is not only the right thing to do, but it is our duty to God..."

cf. Romans 1:8 and 1Corinthians 1:4

** Did Paul think that this was a forced thankfulness, or that it was unusual to be thankful for another Christian's faith?

No - not at all. He thought it was "only fitting".

** With that in mind, for what is Paul thankful regarding the Thessalonians?

He was thankful to God for their "**Enlarged Faith**". Not just the fact that God had given them their faith (which He had), but for the fact that their new faith was "greatly enlarged".

** Is it unusual for the faith of Christians to grow?

No - again! It is the norm, it is expected, if it is the real thing. cf. Ephesians 4:15, 1Peter 2:2

** So how are we to respond when we witness the growth in faith by a brother or sister in Christ?

We are obligated and bound to give thanks to God. It is "only fitting" because of the glory due to His name.

** Can you think of a passage of Scripture which would prove to us that the growth of our faith is caused by God Himself?

1Corinthians 3:6-7 - "...God who causes the growth..."

** As true saving faith grows, what grows with it?

"...and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater."

** It then becomes fair to say that when you see an increasing "love for the brethren", you are witnessing a byproduct of "**Enlarged Faith**". But who taught these believers to love one another?

God Himself - again! cf. 1Thessalonians 4:9

** How closely is genuine saving faith tied to the fact that Christians have a growing love for one another?

It is an undeniable reality. cf. 1Peter 1:22

Peter says, "...fervently love one another from the heart." Fervently translates ektenos, which is a compound adverb, composed of the preposition "ek", "out" and a verbal root meaning "to stretch". It draws the picture of something stretched out and extended to the limit.

** How far will this love go to prove the "**Enlarged Faith**" which gave it birth?

We care more for the lives of our brothers and sisters than we do for our own life! A truly unique characteristic of Biblical Christianity. cf. 1John 3:16

V. 4 ** So Paul is saying that their faith and love for each other are growing, what did that cause him to do?

"therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God..."

** Isn't it a sin to be prideful?

Only when it is used to commend ourselves and not to commend what the Lord has done in others. All see - 1Corinthians 1:26 and 2Corinthians 10:14-18 with Acts 15:3-4

** Now, back in 2Thessalonians 1:4, what were the two things about which Paul felt he could proudly speak unto the glory of God?

The "perseverance and faith" of the Thessalonians. When Paul used the word for perseverance (hupomone), he was speaking literally of a willingness to "remain behind" or a "patient enduring". God had produce this Christ honoring characteristic in the "**Enlarged Faith**" of the Thessalonians.

** If we were to observe a brother or sister demonstrating this kind of growing faith characteristic, what should we do according to the example set before us by Paul in this passage?

We should share it with other Christians to encourage their growth and maturity, while at the same time give glory to God.

** How do you suppose the Thessalonians felt upon reading this portion of Paul's letter?

In must have encouraged them tremendously, because of their great love and respect for Paul.
cf. 1Thessalonians 5:11 and 14 (Paul's passion to be encouraging to his fellow believer)

** Before we conclude our passage for today, let's take one more look at the perseverance and faith of the Thessalonians. Where did it all take place, was theirs a "piece-of-cake" walk with Christ?

Absolutely not! Their perseverance and faith were displayed "in the midst of all [their] persecutions and afflictions which [they] endured.

** How were they able to do that, in light of how young they were in the Lord?

Two things made it possible, both from the Lord.

1Corinthians 10:13 - God is faithful!

2Corinthians 12:9-10 - God's grace is sufficient!

EXTRICATE

** What did we see in today's passage which we are to notice in the lives of other believers?

V.3 - "**Enlarged Faith**", the growth of the faith which belonged to those living in Thessalonica.

V.3 - Love toward one another which grows ever greater.

V.4 - The perseverance and faith of Christians who experience difficult trials.

DELINEATE

** What are we supposed to do once we have observed these things in the lives of other believers?

1) Give thanks to God! It is His work! (V.3)

2) Tell others about it, so we can encourage everyone who involved. (V.4)

EVALUATE

** If we wish to experience this "**Enlarged Faith**", how should I view the trials which the Lord sends my way?

Remember that God is faithful to not over test us and that His grace is always sufficient for the need. (1Corinthians 10:13 and 2Corinthians 12:9-10)

** Is it possible to completely miss what is going on in the lives of other Christians? How can I avoid missing so great an opportunity to encourage others?

Do not be self-centered, but become other-centered. cf. Philippians 2:3-4

ACTIVATE

** Would you take a moment right now and ask the Lord to make you more aware of others around you so that you might encourage them and give Him the glory due His name by recognizing His work in their lives. May we experience the "**Enlarged Faith**" which is available to us through the study of God's word.

Closing prayer