

## 1Thessalonians 12-03-16a

This is Friday, the 16th of March, 2012. We're in the Book of First Thessalonians. We resume tonight at chapter two, verse 15.

We should complete the chapter if all goes well. We'll take a moment as we begin to go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank you for all of the ways that you have blessed us and provided for us and challenged us this past week.

We know that both the blessings and the tests that come our way are woven together for good in your plan and purpose. And we thank you for the watch care and the attention that you have given to each of our individual lives. Not only as we navigate our personal path, but as we interact with one another and as we spend time in fellowship and encouragement and receiving and giving through the spiritual gifts that have been provided.

We thank you for all of those things. We know that all of our abilities are sourced in your word and in your spirit. We thank you for this portion of your word.

And we pray as we study it together this evening that each one will find a meaningful and pertinent application and that all of us together will be blessed and will more closely conform to and reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in his name. Amen.

Let's take a look at where we have been in chapter two. Paul, of course, is reminding them of that threefold interaction where you have a messenger, you have the message and you have the recipients. We've looked at that in some detail.

And so he reminds them in verse 10, you are witnesses and God also how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe, as you know, how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. And from this, we recognize and we have seen that in our life before God, if we have any desire at all, and I think we could all stick our hands up and say, yes, I am someone who wants to please God. I want to walk in the light of his truth and in the fellowship of his son and the Holy Spirit.

I want to arrive on that great judgment day with a minimum of wood, hay and stubble and a maximum of gold and silver and precious stones. I am a narrow road, straight gate, highly motivated, charged to the top of the hill believer. Right.

Well, how do we know we're not being led astray? I had my attention drawn to one of the innumerable cults that have sprung up around Christianity this past week. And I was reading up on it a little bit because I frankly never heard of it. And it and yet it has had thousands of followers.

There seemed to have been a real mushrooming. I'm beginning to think there must be something significant about the early 19th century because your Mormons and your witnesses and just your Christ scientists and so many others had their origins or the people who eventually influenced those who developed a lot of our modern cults. A lot of this stuff sprung up shortly after the founding of this country.

It just seemed a mushroom, not only here, but other places. Anyway, I was reading up on one of these. But how do you know you're not in a cult? How do you know that I, Sam Hall, am not just a cult leader and we're all just mesmerized going down some strange road? How do we know? Well, it is easy to be deceived.

It is easy to think you're right and everybody else is wrong. If you notice, everybody does think they're right and that all others are wrong. Democrats think the Republicans are wrong.

Republicans think, you know, denominations were right. Everybody else is wrong. Large scale groups and small scale groups.

It is a penchant. It is a characteristic. It is a habit that we even individually get an argument.

I think I'm right and you're wrong. I mean, we just we're built this way. So how do we know that our heart, which is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, hasn't led us down some primrose path? And we're smelling flowers that nobody else can even see, much less sense or smell.

And they're just a creation of our own mind. But in particular, how do we know that we have have found some aspect of the truth of God's word? Well, thankfully, praise God. He has given us a promise and it is in his word.

And you don't need anybody to tell it to you. You can pick up any Bible that's got a New Testament in it and go to the promises of God. And the Lord Jesus says, ask and it shall be given.

Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened unto you. Your heavenly father is not going to let you walk off with a substitute, a rock or a snake or a scorpion.

Even human parents love their children enough to prevent that. How much more your heavenly father? We have that promise. The Lord Jesus said, I'm going away, but I will send you the paraclete.

He will lead you into all truth. Well, do we then conclude that everybody that is in error isn't asking, isn't seeking, isn't knocking? Not necessarily. You can have stopped short.

There are lots of different areas of truth, lots of different categories of theology and doctrine and understanding. Different parts of the word of God. Different.

Is it faith? Is it practice? Is it history? Is it eschatology? Is it current application? What are we talking about? There might be somebody that thinks the rapture is going to happen in the middle of the tribulation. But in their daily life, they're just burgeoning fruit, popping out grapes and and filling up baskets in God's economy. Ten times, 30 fold, 60 fold, 100 fold fields.

Right. And yet they're messed up on the timing of the rapture. Well, OK, which would you rather have, baskets of fruit or be right about the timing of one event in eschatology? So this promise and this dedicated fact that God has given us, that if you ask and seek and knock, you will find the truth, is primarily pertinent and applicable for me, myself and I. And when you think of it, it is primarily applicable for you.

It is not a standard by which we can say, well, that person's wrong. Therefore, they're not a seeker. They're not knocking.

They're not asking. Maybe the truth that they're messed up on is not one they particularly need. Maybe it doesn't enter into application so much for them.

We have our hands full walking before the Lord and getting our own stuff lined up. Right. So as I say this, I want to be careful to also say it is a dangerous thing to say, well, I heard a guy on the radio and he had something I've seen in the word of God.

That's obviously he's got it fouled up. Therefore, he's not he doesn't have a good relationship with God. Wrong, wrong application, wrong road to go down.

Who are you to judge another man's servant? Everybody is accountable to God. I hesitate to even talk too much about this principle because it is so easy to immediately start looking over the fence and say, well, I can tell how far you are from the Lord by how many doctrines you have messed up. This promise is for us.

It is between us and the father and. The truth that we need, you know, when when we knock, God doesn't open every door, he opens the door, we're knocking on because we're there and we need entrance, we need to go through and find what's on the other side. When we're seeking, we're seeking a particular thing.

You go to the grocery store. Maybe you're supposed to get green beans. Well, somebody else may be looking for broccoli and they don't care anything about green beans.

You say they don't have any green beans there. They don't have any list. They don't even know they're in the store.

It's not our place. We ask and we seek and we knock and God provides us what we need. And and it is not a criterion by which to judge others.

So I just want to emphasize that up front. Having said that. We have this promise.

How do we know we're not in a cult? Because I have gone to my father and asked him, please, Lord God. Don't let me be in a cult. I genuinely desire your truth.

You have made this promise and I am claiming that if I ask, I will receive. If I seek, I will find. If I knock, you will open the door.

And I honestly, genuinely, humbly, in my deepest heart of hearts, want to know the truth that you have for me. And I know that you will lead me to to communication and to the kind of teaching that will benefit me and equip me for the good works that you have for ordained that I should walk in. And that's my prayer and that's my plea.

And if you make that prayer and that plea and it is genuinely coming from your heart, God will not leave us in error. So this is cult prevention. This is how we know this is an issue in Thessalonica, by the way, because the established religion of the creator God is Judaism.

There is a synagogue there. Right, there are Jews there and these are the people of God. And so these Gentiles, these Greeks, inhabitants of Thessalonica who are seeking God, have started to find him at the synagogue.

They're as close as they've ever been. Right. They're not going to find him at the Temple of Diana.

They're not going to find him at any of these other Greek pantheon areas. They're not going to find him in philosophy. They're going to find him at the synagogue.

And so the Jews have graciously allowed these individuals to come in. Some of them might be proselytes. Others might just be God-fearers who are on the periphery and who listen.

And here comes Paul. And Paul has got a radically different message than what they've been hearing at the synagogue. But many of them say, you know, I've been asking God to reveal himself to me.

And this really has the ring of truth. I just feel a confirmation in my soul. I can see the fulfillment of these old covenant Torah passages that I've been hearing down at the synagogue.

And what's happening? What's happening? God is answering their prayer. They have been asking. They have been seeking.

God has moved heaven and earth and has sent the Apostle Paul along with Silas and Timothy to them. And they have gotten the answer to their prayer and they're excited and they're enthusiastic. But these people that got them the first step, got them out of their pagan ways and looking toward the right God, are jealous and are upset that they're losing their place.

They are no longer the bountiful fount of wisdom. And so there is this episode that we've seen in

Acts where Paul and his companions are eventually run out of town. Well, once Paul is gone, who's got the stage? This is kind of like during the election.

Who's got control of the media? Who's managing the news? Who's spinning the stories that we see in the press? Well, it all depends on who you watch. Well, if somebody cuts off your conservative radio and your conservative TV, who are you left with? Only the left. You're left with the left.

And they get to manage the news and tell the story and spin the events. Well, what do you think's happening in Thessalonica? The old synagogue types, hey, you've known me long before you knew him. I can understand why you might have been temporarily dazzled by this guy and his message.

But, you know, come back to the fold. Come back and let me manage you back into Judaism. So Paul has sent Timothy back to try to balance the picture, to try to remind them of why they responded.

And Timothy comes back with his report. And so Paul is writing this letter. That's our background.

But now the Thessalonians have to make a decision. Well, so I got my initial information from Judaism, but then I've responded. So which one is right? How do I know which one is right? They're both quoting scripture.

They're both claiming facts about the same God. I can see some weight on one side, seeing some weight on the other. So how do I choose? We have this today.

Somebody, especially people that are new believer, well, what church do I go to? Should I be a Catholic? Should I be an Episcopalian? Should I be a Baptist, Methodist? There's just a smorgasbord. There's 500-odd denominations, not to mention all the cults. Which direction do I go? How do we know? So Paul is talking about this.

And that's why it is important to recognize that when he talks about the messengers, the message, and the reception of the message, he is explaining some of the same things we saw in Peter's letters about what it means to find God's truth. We have the prophetic word made more certain. I am an eyewitness conveying these things to you, but what you're getting is even better than what I got with my own eyes.

John says the same thing in his epistles. That which we have seen, which our ears have heard and our hands have handled, we are passing along to you, and you're getting it as testimony. How do you know that it's valid? We're back to the same thing.

John, Peter, and Paul are all talking about the same thing. And it is pertinent for us because anybody, and I mean anybody, can get off base, off track. Me, anybody you've ever heard teaching the word of God can wind up in weeds that never grew in any biblical soil whatsoever.

The heart is deceitful, and there will always be some aspect of a message that has an appeal. It hooks in to some negative part of our nature, hooks into our pride. Well, we're the Jews.

We're the seed of Abraham. Obviously, we're the people of promise. And you've got to come to us, and you can join us, but you're never going to be quite us because you just don't have that blood.

You don't have that genetic lineage and heritage of father, son, father, son, going all the way back to the 12 tribes. So you'll always be just a little bit of a demi, a little bit of a second-class citizen. You're a proselyte.

You're almost as good, but not quite. And anytime there's a dispute, we've got that little bit of an edge. Well, who are you to be talking to me because I'm a Jew and you're not? It always hooks in.

There is a blindness that afflicts us where we can sharpshoot behavior in others, and we can be doing the very same thing exponentially greater, and we just can't see it. It takes the power of God to make those scales drop off our eyes. So I'm back to my question.

How do you know you're not in a cult? How do you know I'm not just spinning tails and you're being led down a path? And when Jesus comes back, you're going to be standing there with no robe and no crown and no nothing because it was all messed up. How do we know? Paul is answering that question for the Thessalonians because they are wrestling with this. Should I go back to the synagogue or should I stick with Christianity as Paul and his companions presented it? They just had basically the two choices.

They've already discarded atheism or pantheism or, or idolatry and so on, but they still got to choose. And we face this problem. Should I be a Baptist or Methodist or a Bible church person? Well, so this is pertinent.

Now, if you look at verse 13 in First Thessalonians, chapter two, what does it say? For this reason, we also thank God without ceasing. Because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us and right away, you've got this logos. Which you heard para us.

You got next to us. You were beside us para alongside, but it's, it's the word of God. It's really interesting in Greek.

Let me see if I can find it right quick here. But, uh, you received the word of God, which you heard from us. You welcomed it, not as the word of men, not as the logos of anthropoi, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

So we told you it was the word of God, but you heard it from men, but you didn't receive it as the word of men. You received it as the word of God. It's almost like a little chiasm.

Here's the word of God coming through men. You heard it from men, but you treated it as the word of God. It went through the man pipe, but it started out being the word of God.

And it ended up in your soul as the word of God. And you were able to look past the intermediate step. You heard it from us, but you saw that it was the word of God.

Now, what's going to happen when they look at the word that comes from the Judaizers, from the synagogue types, from these Jews who are jealous and who ran Paul out of town and took all adjacent stuff? Well, Paul is implying that when you listen to them, they're going to tell you that they are giving you the word of God, but when you receive it, something is going to be different and you will not treat this word of men, which it is in truth, the word of men coming from the Judaizers. So there's some sort of a discriminator that enables us to tell the difference between the word of God and the word of men, even though both of them come from men might think it's difficult. Is it live or is it Memorex? They don't have that commercial anymore because there's no, nobody buys tapes for anything, but we used to have that.

Is it live or is it Memorex is, is this coming from man or is it in truth? The word of God. And Paul says, we rejoice and we're thankful. And we pray for you all the time, because when you heard the word of God from us, para alongside us, you didn't receive it as though it was just the word of men.

Well, this by the way, is a huge factor when people go to seminary or when people go to a bookstore and pick up a commentary, what is the commentary? It's man talking about the word of God, right? Well, is the man talking about, or a teacher on the radio or a teacher in the living room talking to you? It's a man talking. Well, are his ideas, man's ideas or God's ideas? Is the word he is speaking the word of man or the word of God? How do you know? Well, look at how Paul wraps this up. He says, we are so thankful because when you received this word, you didn't receive it as the word of man, but as the word of God.

And then what does it say? Which is at work in you who believe, which is at work. So this says, one of the ways, you know, you're getting the word of God is it makes a difference. If you are a genuine seeker and you are hungry for the word of God, when you get the word of God, it makes a difference.

It is at work. It has an energy, Energeti from Energeo. There is an energy in that word.

So all these Thessalonians have to do is think back. You know, I always, I felt like I was on the right track down at the synagogue, but I always felt there was something missing. It just didn't have that power.

It, I just never was quite satisfied. I never came away saying, ah, there it is. I was hungry and I was never quite filled.

Now, when the apostle Paul came, I came away. Can you imagine what it'd be like to be in an apostle Paul Bible class? Oh my goodness. Just rich with answers to questions and painting the landscape of the plan and purpose of God, why we're here, where we're going.

I hope we can hear some of those in the millennial kingdom. God let Paul sit up there. We'll all understand what he's saying and he'll just let loose and he'll say, let me tell you what I told the Philippians when I was over there.

Let me tell you what I told the Thessalonians before I got run out of town. Here's, here's my Bible class. And it'll just be, it'll be fantastic.

And you come away from that with that light bulb on, with that Energeti, it is at work. It makes a difference. You want to, you want to think about it afterward.

It makes an, it has an effect. It makes an impact. That's what Paul says.

You'll know you are hearing the truth because it is going to be at work. When you mix yeast into your, into your dough, it starts working. And if you come back and look at that dough later, the dough has changed.

It has transformed. If you put live seeds into soil and water them and leave them a little while, they transform, they change. There, there is growth.

There is a difference made. It's Energeti. It effectively works.

So how do you know you're not in a cult? Hey, there's people in cults that change. They sell all their goods and go down to Guyana or something and drink Kool-Aid. Or they, you know, go down to the Branch Davidian Complex in Waco and hang out.

That, you know, they've, they've changed. They've, we're not looking at Davidians and we're not looking at Jim Jones cult. We're looking at ourselves.

I look at myself. I'm not worried about people that are in cults. They're on their own recognizance.

They've got to answer to God for what they do. And their leaders have got to answer for what they do. Remember now, as I started out this evening, we're talking about me.

When I look at myself, do I see a beneficial, productive change? And am I rejoicing? A lot of these people that sell their stuff and move down to complexes, by the way, are not that happy. It's, it's, well, I've got to, because that's what they say. This work that takes place in our soul, Paul refers to it over and over again.

You received it with joy. You were rejoicing. You had that aha moment when you heard it.

This is one of the ways we know we are not following a cult. We are not off in the weeds because

the spirit bears witness with our spirit. God, the Holy Spirit is a gift to us from God and he will affirm and he will give us his fruit when we are on the right track in God's actual truth.

What is the fruit of the spirit? I will find myself with a greater degree of what? Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, and self-control. Those things I will see in myself. I'm not worried of anybody else.

I will see in myself progress in those things. If I see love and joy and peace and patience and these other things growing in my soul, guess what? I am not in a cult. I am not listening to the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

This is what excited the apostle Paul among the Thessalonians because he knew, because he himself had had that experience when he left the deadness and the artifice of Judaism and came to life in Christ and all of his Old Testament knowledge suddenly was galvanized and illuminated and brought to bear. He could see that in himself. And when he starts preaching to the Thessalonians who have been listening to the same stuff that he was trained in as a Pharisee and that he used to teach as a Pharisee, they came to that same understanding and saw the fruit of the spirit begin to grow in themselves as well.

Then he got run out of town and the Judaizers tried to come back and say, come back to the dead side, come back to the dark side, come back to the legalism, come back to the rules, come back to the we're better than you. You know, of course, you wouldn't think they would have much of a prayer, but they've got the microphone. They've got the platform.

It's their turn to speak. And Paul's having difficulty. He says, I just think about you all the time.

I wish I could come back. I can't. I sent Timothy trying to, you know, make sure you don't get led astray, that Satan doesn't get his way.

And he mentioned Satan over and over again, because Satan targets those who begin to figure things out, who begin to get on that narrow road, who begin to really walk in the light. Listen, this is a strategic problem for Satan and he will try every trick in the book. And that's why as soon as Paul reviews these things a few times, he's starting to talk about, you know, we tried to come back, but Satan hindered us.

And we want to build up your faith that the tempter doesn't get his way. And that's what's coming up in our context. So I'm just telling you now, the reason Paul is focusing on this is what we were like among you.

And this is what you were like once you heard this message is because you saw it for what it is, not the word of man, but the word of God. That's the proof. And you can't go applying it to anybody else.

It's a proof for me. I apply it to myself. God, the Holy Spirit is a gift to me and the word of God

comes to me and I see the fruit of the spirit.

And because I have prayed and claimed God's promise for asking and seeking and knocking, I know that I am not led astray. My heavenly father will not allow me to go very far down that road at all. So this is how we know.

I can't prove this to somebody else. I can't argue somebody else out of their beliefs. And it's really not my job.

My job and your job is to ensure that we are receiving the word of God, even though it comes through human lips, as it is in truth, the word of God and that it is effectually working in us. And we have that fruit. We have that joy.

And that's what he talks about. It is at work in you who make it the object of your faith and you who are Pistou Amen. You who are believers, faithers.

You faithers are the ones who find it at work because you can complete that entire process. Actual truth is being communicated through human lips and it is in truth the word of God and you hear it. But as it says in Hebrews, it's not mixed with faith in them that heard it.

And if you're not a faither, all of that other went to waste. Some of the people in Thessalonica, you know, after the dazzle wore off, after Paul and his companions weren't there anymore, they went back to the synagogue. It was a flash in the pan and they didn't trust the message.

It was more convenient. They had some social ties. They had some friends down at the synagogue, had some business relationships that depended on that synagogue interaction.

Hail fellow well met. See you at the golf course. See you on the Sabbath.

Oh yeah. Feast coming up. I'll be there.

And they weren't faithers. They weren't believers. So God has done his part, supplying us his spirit, ensuring that his truth is available to us.

We have got to be those who faith, those who believe, those who trust and receive it as it is in truth, the word of God. Well, this brings us to our section for tonight in 15 through 20 and let's just read this before we go on the break. You brethren became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus.

We spent two weeks on what it is to be mimeti, following in the pattern, having an echo conforming to the same situation, so to speak. Those in Judea who were persecuted, you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews. And there's been a lot of scholarly ink spilled over what does it mean to be a countryman? Does this mean that the Greeks were suffering from the Greeks or does it mean that the Jews were suffering from the

Jews in Thessalonica? Well, yes.

These Jews in Thessalonica have lived there a good long time. This is now their adopted homeland and their countrymen are the Thessalonians. Remember, it's a free, it's a free area.

They've been granted their own autonomy. And so that's their country. They're a little mini republic.

And so their countrymen are, yes, Gentiles and yes, Jews, both. There's hostility not only from the synagogue types, but also from others, as Paul encountered in other places. So it doesn't really matter if they're Jews or Gentiles.

Here these people are responding to the truth of God, the word of God, and their neighbors, their community members are persecuting them for it, resisting them, pushing against their faith. And Paul says, you know, the churches in Judea hit this same problem. You're, you're an echo.

You're a reflection of that same problem. Then in verse 15, these Jews that persecuted them are the ones who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, their own prophets and drove us out. So what has he done? He has already talked about what he was like among them, what he and his companions were like and what they were like when they heard the message.

And he says, now you think about those synagogue types. They are just like the Jews back in Israel who crucified the Lord Jesus, persecuted and killed their own prophets and drove us out. So messenger makes a difference.

You go to the pastoral epistles. If a man is going to be an elder, here are the qualifications. You can't just have any old messenger.

Why? Because it's part of the process of identifying a valid message is that there be a messenger who reflects the truth. You can't just, you know, you think, well, can't I just write the word of God on the bathroom wall? It doesn't really matter how it comes. I could be a drunk and a profligate and an addict and a nerdy well and a jail escapee.

But if I teach the truth, isn't it God's truth? God says part of the identification of the message is you're going to see that message at work in the messenger, just as it is at work in those who receive it. And Paul points to himself and he says, you know what kind of people we were among you. And Paul tells Timothy and Titus, you men have got to be examples to the flock.

You have to be identifiable as a carrier of God's truth. You have to be someone in whom it has made a difference. You have to be.

And that's why there is disqualification for pastors. You can mess up and disqualify yourself. You say, well, maybe you can be a pastor and not be a pastor anymore when you mess up and you can still be a teacher.

Well, maybe so. I don't know. All I'm saying is, Paul says, when you heard the message, and by the way, Paul is not the Thessalonians pastor, but it's difficult for me.

I have good friends who have more than one who have disqualified themselves on paper, at least from pastoring, but who now teach. I honestly don't know because the teaching is just better than mine. And so you say, well, can't I listen to that and grow? What I would say is, look at this criteria.

Do you see it as the word of God and not the word of men? And when it comes to you, does it produce fruit? Do you grow? Do you have the fruit of the spirit? If so, amen. God bless you. Keep listening.

If there is something about that messenger that prevents that effect, if it becomes the word of man, if the man becomes an issue and you can't shake the issue. And by the way, there could be 10 people in a room, five of them could say, I don't care what this guy did 10, 15, 20, 25 years ago. I really don't care.

He's a faithful messenger now, and I am taking what he's saying as the word of God. And it makes a difference in my soul. Five others could be saying, you know, no matter how many times I look at this guy, I just keep thinking about that thing that happened 10, 15, 20, 25 years ago, and I just can't shake it.

Well, those five cannot take his teaching as the word of God. It keeps becoming the word of man. The man becomes an issue.

Those five need to move on and do something else. The five who say the man is not the issue, it's the message, and he's not currently in any way, shape or form disqualified. Keep listening.

That's my that's my application of this passage, because you all know there are people who have done this and who have returned to teaching. Some of them returned to pastoring. Well, I am not ready to judge another man's servant.

I can only tell you what Paul says here. And Paul says the man who delivers the message is an issue. And when you hear him, you have to be able to take what he says, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

And it has to be Energeo within you. It has to be making a difference. And if it is, then the process is working and there's nothing wrong with listening to that messenger or that message.

That's what I see in this passage. And again, you can't look over and say you shouldn't be listening to so and so. It's for me.

It's what it's what works for me. It's what God is doing within me. It is the Energeo inside me.

That's the standard. And you can't tell me who to listen to. I can't tell you who to listen to.

God will tell all of us who to listen to through this criteria. And that's a great thing, because there are many teachers. Paul says you can have 10,000 teachers.

You may not have many fathers, but you can have 10,000 teachers. And I say the more teachers, the more likely we are to get more truth and get further down the road. And that's what we need.

So if you can find anybody that gets the word of God across in a way that is meaningful and produces that fruit of the spirit, my counsel is listen to them until your ears fall off. Listen to as many good teachers as you can find. You can't get too much of the word of God.

Let's pause here and take a break. When we come back, we'll pursue our progress through this section. What does it mean when it says these men displease God, oppose all men, hinder us from speaking to the Gentiles, and they fill up the measure? This is a fascinating phrase.

Fill up the measure of their sins. We're going to take a look at that filling up the measure when we come back.