

1Thessalonians 12-03-16b

Let's resume our study in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, and we're looking at the section verses 15 through 20. We backed up a little bit into 13, but what we are leading up to is the persecution of the messenger. Paul says, you've got to know whether or not the messenger is valid in the same way that you've got to identify whether the message is valid.

Because one of Satan's tactics when he can't get the suppression of the message is he'll attack the messenger. So now, not only do we have to figure out is it the word of man or the word of God, but when we're listening to the man who is delivering the word, is he a legitimate messenger or not? And Paul says, you can't tell just because the man is attacked. You are following, you are imitator, you are imitators of the churches in Judea.

Well, what happened to the churches in Judea? The Jews were saying, this man Christ is bogus. He brought a bad message. You shouldn't be following him.

And these disciples slash apostles who are talking about him, they're illegitimate. You shouldn't be listening to them. And this was Satan's earliest attack on the gospel of Christ, is the people involved are not legitimate.

You remember even during Jesus' lifetime, the Jews were, and the leaders of the Jews were circulating rumors that he was illegitimate and that he was crazy and that he had no education and that he, you know, they're calling him son of Mary. And it's an attack on the individuals involved. Jesus Christ isn't just a messenger of the word.

He is the word, but the tactic is the same. And the disciples were imputing, can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Look at these Galileans. They've drunk too much wine.

You remember on the day of Pentecost, they said, well, these guys are drunk. Ad hominem attack, attack the person, attack the man, attack the messenger, shoot the messenger. You don't have to listen to the message anymore.

This is Satan's tactic. And that's why Paul says that in the, he points out that in the spread of the gospel from the very beginning, there were attacks on the messenger. Well, we've got to ascertain whether an attack on a messenger is legitimate.

I'll give you another example, which isn't quite in our passage, but it's, it's interesting to me. Paul, among many other things, was accused of preaching for money. Well, is this a legitimate attack or not? You remember that during much of his traveling ministry and in his letters back to the churches that he visited, he is seeking to take up a collection to help the poor Christians back in Judea, right? This is where you get in Corinthians, lay up on the first day of the week, you know, your offerings that there be no collections when I come.

Now, why would he say that? Why wouldn't he say, well, on the first day of the week, everybody's set by, you know, and lay it up. And then when I come, we'll have a big old collection. We'll have a massive offering plate passing when I get there, he says, you all start collecting it now once a week, you know, set a little aside and get it all pooled.

And then when I come, we're not going to take up a collection. Why did he say that? Because he is, I think, fending off this charge that, well, Paul says he works with his hands and that he's, you know, he's doing it for free and he's not making merchandise of the gospel, but where's all this money going that he's collecting? He's doing just like all the rest of these guys. He's shilling.

He's fleecing. He's getting the money. And this is a problem for Paul.

And he is having to explain and remind people, you remember, I wasn't doing it for money. If I was doing it for money, why did we mend tents and work with our hands and not be a burden to any one of you? This is his tacit, his implicit as well as explicit defense against the charge that he's just preaching for money. And there's also some allegation, if you will, even in the modern scholarly world, that Paul wasn't being entirely forthright in his letters when he says, don't you remember how we came and preached the gospel free of charge? Because in other letters he says time and again, you Philippians sent money and supported us.

Well, if he's being supported by people, then how can he say he's preaching for free? Well, it gets entangled. It gets difficult for Paul to make his case because he is in fact being sustained by gifts from, just as the Lord Jesus was, sustained by gifts from ladies who provided for their needs, made them clothing, made them meals, gave them some traveling money. And Paul has the same thing.

And what is he really saying? He is not preaching in order to get money, but obviously he needs money to travel around and preach. And there is a difference. But people would take this and twist it.

So why am I going through all of this? Because here's a case where Paul is illegitimately being attacked. He is being called a purveyor of information for money when he's not. But they will construe the gifts that he gets and say, see, these churches are sending you money, you're preaching for money.

Well, no, he's not. And he quite often spent the days laboring with his hands to earn enough to cover his expenses. And many times there were no gifts.

And at different points in his ministry, everybody has abandoned him. Only one guy is with me and here I am in chains. And he would get discouraged because he was largely forgotten, it would seem.

Well, people would take facts and twist them. So we have an additional task as we look at a

messenger. And that is if there are allegations made or charges brought or even, you know, for us it's more informal, it's just observations.

If somebody is on the radio and they say, you know, for a gift of \$24.95 we'll send you our six cassette series or our six CD series or whatever it may be, unless and so. And you say, well, are they making merchandise of the word of God? It seems like there's an awful lot of advertisements and there's an awful lot of products, an awful lot of resources. And, you know, am I really just, is this sort of a thing where in order to get very much you've got to pay? And is this a legitimate accusation that this ministry is too money oriented and not enough grace oriented? You have other ministries where it's all of grace.

You order tapes, they come for free. You order books, they come for free. You listen, you get on the web, you can access anything you want, it's all free.

God has provided for them in some other way. And you say, well, so is this superior to that? Is this automatically better teaching than that because it's totally free and it's of grace and over here you've got to pay? Well, this is practical. Do you see my point? We have to make this determination.

Is it legitimate to just say, well, they charge, so that's no good. These are free, so this is good. No.

Paul has given us the criteria. What is the criteria? How do you know that it's not the word of man, it's the word of God? There is this Energeto, Energeti. It is at work.

And you have something at which to aim your faith. You are a truster. You are a believer.

You are, what I would say, you are an applier. You are putting this into application and it is producing fruit in your life. Your thoughts have changed.

You've got more peace. You're generally happier. You're easier to get along with.

You're more patient. You put up with more and you don't get wrinkled and rattled and irascible. You just go with the flow.

You tolerate a lot more. You're long-suffering. You're gentle.

You don't climb up and tear shingles off over minor things. This is how you know the word of God is at work. Well, the word of God can't be at work unless you're getting the word of God.

And so, if the messenger isn't getting in the way, if whatever charges... Now, there might have been some people who were hearing these accusations against Paul and it really, truly seemed to them, you know, I just can't get over the fact that he keeps talking about he's preaching for free and I know I carried that Philippian gift. I know he's getting money from other places. And in their

minds, the way they construe it, they think Paul is preaching for money.

Well, guess what? Paul might not be the teacher for them. Maybe Peter will be blowing through town. Maybe John will write a letter.

Maybe there'll be an Epaphras or a Tychicus or somebody who will come by. Maybe it'll be Timothy. Maybe it'll be Titus.

And maybe that'll be the guide that they don't have issues with the messenger. That's why there's so many messengers. Not everybody can listen to the same messenger.

We don't have a pope. We don't have a bishop. We don't have a prelate or a cleric or whatever you want to call them.

God has many, many different shepherds and a lot of us are just built different. We've got weaknesses and strengths. There's things we can overlook and stuff we can't because of the way we're built and because we're flawed and not perfect.

By the way, Paul the Apostle, just because he saw Jesus on the Damascus Road, didn't make him perfect. Paul made mistakes in his ministry. He had errors in judgment.

And some of these might have come up in the minds of people who were listening to him. They said, you know, that Paul, it just sticks in my craw. And it's legitimate.

They did see him make a mistake. They might have said, I can't believe he went back to Jerusalem and took a vow and went to the temple and paid for these other guys. That just sticks in my craw.

I can't listen to a guy who talks about grace and he's back at the temple doing these things. Well, maybe they've got a legitimate beef. For them, he's not going to be the guy.

And they can't listen to Paul and end up with love and joy and peace. We have a responsibility to find a source of the teaching of the Word of God that is beneficial for us. And we've had people come to our group and leave our group.

And I absolutely am happy that they came and I'm happy that they left. Because if they are not finding what they need, it doesn't mean they're a bad person or a lapsed Christian or that there's something wrong with them. It isn't a fit.

It isn't a match. God has somebody else for them. If they're asking and seeking, there's somebody else who can do a better job, who the combination of personal things and communication style and many other things, that's going to be the fit for them.

And God bless them. I love them. I pray for them.

I have no hard feelings whatsoever. I am not. I will be the first one to tell you that I am not the pastor for very many people.

I'm just not. And I don't think that I ought to be. Honestly, I don't want to be.

I love the group that God has given me. I praise God. I can echo everything that Paul ever says about the people that he is thankful for and praised for and is grateful to God for and that he expects one day to wear as his glory and crown.

And I don't care if it's one person or two people or ten people or ten thousand people. It just doesn't matter to me. It is all the same in God's eyes.

But I recognize the fact that every pastor, every teacher, has to recognize the fact that he is not the be-all and end-all communicator. And there's nothing wrong with people who are seeking, looking around, finding the source that God has for them. And they might be in a little country church.

They might be in a big city church. They might be in a home church. They might be in a brick-and-mortar church.

They might have to do everything over the web. Not my business. All I do is do the very best I can to study and teach.

Every teacher, every pastor has to do that and let God figure out which sheep are going to be there. The sheep, which I would say, you know, sheep is kind of almost a negative term today, but those who listen, those who are seeking, those who are hungry for the Word of God, it is our responsibility as listeners to be sure that we have found a messenger and a message that is going to be at work in us and that produces, because we are seekers, we are askers, we are knocking on the door wanting to please God, wanting to reflect His glory, wanting to be all we can be in this life to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we want.

You wouldn't be listening to me if that isn't what you want. And I know it is. And all of us have that urge and that natural hunger.

And God will supply it. We have that promise. So this is really what Paul is talking about.

You can glide through Thessalonians and he says, We thank God for you, and you heard us, and we had a good time there, and you had a good time with us, and then things kind of went bad, but we were anxious to hear about you. You can blow right through Thessalonians and say, Well, it looks like they really got along well, and you hang it up and go somewhere else. This is what the substance and the meat of this letter is about.

It is essential. These people have a crisis. They heard this message, they had a quick reaction to it, and suddenly Paul was gone.

And now they've got a decision to make. We've been at the synagogue for years. We've been listening to old Rabbi so-and-so down there, and he was always a good old sort and was kindly, and there's other wonderful people down there, and we've got some relationships and some longstanding fellowship, and now it's hurt their feelings that we've gone off.

They don't believe in this Paul guy, and we do, and it's created a rift, and that can't be good. Doesn't God want us all to? And they're wrestling with it. It's difficult.

And we face this today. You can progress. All of us used to listen to somebody else, and we learned.

And this may not be the ending stop. I might listen and, you know what, I haven't learned anything from Sam in a year and a half. I've got to find me somebody that can take me out of the 6th grade into the 7th grade or out of the 9th grade into the 10th grade.

If you ever get that feeling, please look around and find any way that you can keep growing. Nobody will be more in your corner than me. I don't expect that I'm going to be the ending stop for everybody, and, well, I've listened to other guys, and now I'm here.

You may need to keep going, and that is fine. Trust me when I tell you. It will do nothing but make me happy that you are so hungry that I just can't keep you fed.

That's great. And every good teacher of the Word of God feels that way. Some of us are kindergarten teachers.

I'm not. I can't, you know, new believers, I am not a good guy to take freshly minted, newly regenerated people and do the basic things. It's not my gift.

It's not my area. In the same way that a guy that teaches, you know, 10th grade pre-calculus in the 10th grade wouldn't necessarily be good at teaching 2nd grade or 3rd grade. He's got his niche.

He can communicate and connect with a certain strata, and God prepares teachers at every different level, and there are very few teachers who can do it all. I can teach kindergarten. I can teach PhDs.

I'm just the universe. No, really, nobody can do that, and this is why God moves us from place to place. So don't fight it.

This can be won in a series of places. So how do you know? How do you know? How do you know you're in the right place, listening to the right message? You look at the result. The communicator needs to be qualified.

If the communicator is a rascal, I promise you, you're in the wrong place. No communicator of a

good message can remain a rascal for very long. The message will either convict him and fix him, or he will start perverting the message, and it won't be good anymore.

You cannot have the same fountain producing fresh water and bitter water. By their fruit ye shall know them, and by them you will know the fruit. I mean, it's interconnected.

So you don't pick, what does the scripture say? You don't get figs off of thistles and grapes off of thorns. You just don't. So that's one criteria.

And this is what Paul is talking about. He says, you remember what kind of people we were among you. You remember the reception that you gave us.

And when you hear these accusations, you know whether these accusations have any traction or not in your own mind because we were there among you. If it caused you too big of a problem, you're probably not listening now anyway. But he says there's the messenger, there's the message, which is going to be the word of man no matter how you slice it.

You're hearing it through human lips. But you received it not as the word of man, but as it truly is the word of God. And it is at work in you who are having faith in it, who are faithing it.

Pistou Amen. Present idea. So that's what he's talking about.

And that's why he's talking about himself and why he's talking about them. It isn't just blandishments. It's not flattery.

It's not fluff. It's not Twinkies. It has a purpose.

It's here for a reason. And it is a necessary and very applicable truth for us. We have to pay attention to this.

We can't get complacent. We can't be apathetic. We can't be indifferent.

We have to be actively asking and seeking and knocking and trusting that God is going to provide and watching for that provision. So this is why Paul says when he continues in verse 14, You became imitators of the churches of God, which are in Judea, in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen.

If you get on this path, if you find the communicator and you find the word of God coming from that communicator and it starts to make a difference in you and it is energetically at work in you, one of the benefits is that Satan is going to make you a target. It's not a problem. It's a benefit.

This is one of the ways you know you're on the right track. Not only that you can vet the messenger and you can vet the message, but you're going to have opportunities to push through opposition. Satan is going to find that you are important and he is going to try to throw obstacles in the way.

He'll throw stuff at the messenger. He'll throw stuff at the message. And he'll throw stuff at you.

All three parts of the process. These people killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets. That's the messenger.

And have persecuted us, the latest messengers. And they do not please God and are contrary to all men. They are hostile.

They are deleterious. They are negative to all men. Nobody gets in the company of these people and finds love and joy and peace and patience and all the rest of the fruit of the spirit.

These guys are antimatter. They are acid. They are spleen.

They are bile. They are contrary. They're a downer.

They're a bumner. It's gloomsville with these people. They're judgmental.

They're critical. They're holier than thou. They've got a little clique going.

And if you have any love for the word of God and any recognition of the light, when you get into this environment, it's just depressing. They're contrary. I just feel a sudden slowing of my momentum anytime I'm in the presence of these people.

Paul is saying, look, this is how you know. Am I in a cult? Am I in the right church or the wrong church? Am I in the right group or the wrong group? Am I listening to good teaching or bad teaching? And by the way, even on the radio, even on the internet, even off of a tape, however you get it, in a book, off of a thumb drive, in your phone, whatever it might be, there is going to be a response. Remember, he says in another place, the spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

You just feel like a child of God when you're listening to this teaching. It draws you close to the Heavenly Father. You become closer to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is just an uplifting and an up-building. That's what edification means. And the rest of it, you find yourself looking over and thinking, well, those people are messed up.

I was listening to my short wave last night. There's a pretty strong station that comes out of Tennessee. In fact, two strong stations come out of Tennessee.

I was listening to one of them, and this guy evidently is a pastor. He was making a really good point from Scripture, but where he started from was kind of messed up. In a nutshell, apparently he teaches that the church is still under the law.

I only heard this one deal, and so he was just taking it for granted. And he said, we understand

that we should never eat pork and that we're under these dietary laws and that we should not touch the unclean thing. So the laws of clean and unclean and the laws of diet, he sees, and he has taught for years, he teaches his congregation, you've got to observe those.

So he had a situation where his son or brother or somebody really, I think it was his son, was in a car accident and had a big gash in his face and they needed to sew it up. Well, he asked the doctor, well, what are you sewing that as a guy is sewing away? He said, what are you sewing that up with? He said, well, this is cat gut. And he said, whoa, cat gut.

Cats are unclean. This is a defilement. And had another case where a woman was pregnant, but she was having difficulty, went to the doctor and she was about to miscarry.

And they said, you've got to take this pill. Well, they looked at the ingredients of the pill and it had a collagen that comes from pigs. It's kind of like Jell-O, it's boiled out of pigs.

And they said, well, how much of that is in there? Well, they did the calculations on grams or whatnot. Well, one 1200th of an ounce of collagen in each pill that was swine sourced. Well, should she take the pill or not? Should they allow the doctor to use this or not? And this guy to his credit said, you know what? There is a higher law.

The Lord Jesus said, you've got to look to a higher law. And he said, it's okay for the cat gut. It's okay for the pill because there's something greater at work.

Do you want to sacrifice a mother and her child over one 1200th of an ounce of pig collagen? No. Do you want to sacrifice a guy's face and his muscle mobility and what he's going to look like the rest of his life over the fact that the thread, which is going to dissolve away, is made from a cat? No. And you see what I mean? He's teaching a good truth in the midst of a false assumption.

So now what do you do? Well, can I recommend this guy and say you should listen to him or should I go to his congregation and say, you people need to get out of that church. You can't eat bacon. I mean, what's the matter with you? No ham sandwiches? Come on.

No BLTs? You're missing out. Well, my point is, this passage is so practical because it's not my business to tell him or anybody in his church what to do. Those people are living by their lights.

He is an under-shepherd before the Lord Jesus Christ and he's going to answer for what he does. But I can tell from listening to him that he loves the Lord. He loves the Word of God.

He is doing his best to live in its light. And he is endeavoring to not be legalistic and to recognize that there is grace and there is room for interpretation in the Scripture. And if he keeps up with that, he might eventually figure out that you know what, I think maybe I goofed on this whole live under the dietary law thing.

Maybe he will, maybe he won't. But the issue for the people in his church is does this messenger

communicate the truth of God? Do I receive it as the Word of God? And when it gets in my soul and I put my faith in it, does it answer my prayer when I ask and I seek and I knock? Is it energetically at work in me and am I producing the fruit of the Spirit? Now these people are relaxed about laying off bacon and trying to avoid the unclean things. There is a lot of practical wisdom in the law that God gave Moses for the children of Israel.

And you don't hurt yourself if you live under the law. A lot of it is, how are you going to do that? Are you going to browbeat and condemn other people that don't? Or are you just going to say, you know, I really think that there is a lot of wisdom in this, it's from God, and I want to please God so I'm going to do this. A lot of those people living under that will probably get credit and have fruit because of why they are doing what they do.

Are they messed up? Yeah. Do they maybe not understand dispensation, not understand Israel and the church? Probably. But if they are taking what they are getting as from God and seeking to apply it, God is more concerned with our heart.

And anybody that really needs to get the truth, there is a good pastor saying, you know, don't push this to an extreme. There is a higher law, the law of love, the law of Christ, that says there is a time to observe these things, but if on the Sabbath you see somebody in dire straits, you need to pull them out of a ditch, you don't say, well, we can't work on the Sabbath, sorry, I'll see you tomorrow. You pull them out.

There is a higher law, a practical idea, and he did a beautiful job of illustrating and teaching this truth. And I would say there is probably a lot of people listening to him that are doing just fine. Some of them might grow to, through, and out of that church, others might comfortably stay there for the rest of their lives.

Not my business. They have to decide for themselves just as you and I have to decide for ourselves. If I'm comfortable with the messenger, he seems to meet the biblical criteria.

This message, I can easily, I have no problem accepting it, not as the word of man, but as the word of God. And when I put my faith in it and I live in its light, I am joyful. I feel growth.

I see progress. I can detect an improvement and an increase in the fruit of the Spirit. We're in the right place.

We're doing the right thing. God is answering our prayer, and we just keep it up. That's what Paul is, that's essentially what he has said in these first two chapters.

And he says, and when you start doing this and you start hitting resistance, it's not a time to necessarily question the messenger, question the message, question yourself, did you do the right thing? It's a time to recognize that when you hit this stride, Satan is going to appear and start throwing stuff at you, and you need to know why you are doing what you are doing. You have

already built it on this foundation. You already know about the messenger and the message and the reception.

You know these things, and when Satan starts throwing stuff at you, you say, that's a satanic attack, that's not a legitimate criticism. That's not a legitimate point to make. This is obfuscation.

This is the tempter. This is the enemy trying to come in and throw me off of this stride that I just now hit. But we have to know, we have to derive these things out of this passage and see clearly enough to distinguish between a legitimate point and an illegitimate satanic attack.

And Paul has very beautifully laid this out, and it reads so smoothly and it reads so nice, and you think, well, he's just happy to hear it from them, and they're happy to hear it from him, and they're just greeting each other, and buttering each other up, and praying for each other, and hail fellow well met. It's easy to miss how important the substance of this message is. So I hope we've been able to see it in these first two chapters, because he's going to conclude by saying these persecutors, these that Satan has used, they're believers, and yet Satan has used them to attack us.

They do not please God, and they are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved. Even these legalists ought to recognize that there's a higher law. Yes, they're a Gentile, and they might be unclean, but they need to be saved.

This is like the man that falls into a ditch on the Sabbath. Do they not even see the higher law? They're even bad Judaizers. They're even bad Jews.

They're bad law keepers, because they don't recognize that higher law. So always to fill up their sins. And I didn't get to it tonight, but just think about it.

Remember when God told Abraham that the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full, and it was going to be another 430 years? God bides His time. There is a filling up. God will let people do their thing, and they will fill up.

Jesus is going to say the same thing over in Matthew 23-32. Fill up the measure of the sins of your fathers. There is this concept of sin that goes along.

Well, this is another way you can identify a satanic attack. You see this filling up. It increases.

It becomes more substantial and more easily identified for what it is. If somebody just gives you a little quarter of a teaspoon of Jell-O, you can't always tell what the flavor is, but if they make you eat a whole bowl, you can say that was lime. That was cherry.

That was orange. The more you have, the more easy it is to identify. And Paul says they are going to fill up.

You notice the measure of *is* in italics. To fill up their sins. Their sins will become more and more evident, more and more manifest.

Just watch over time. If you're not sure, just wait and watch. And if you see that sin measure filling up, that's the satanic attack.

And wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. God will judge. God is keeping track.

Well, that brings us to verse 17. We, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time. And he's going to reiterate his strong desire to be with them.

That's where we'll pick up next time. We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth and the illumination, the guidance of your word, how practical it is for us.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will impress it on our hearts. Each one of us will see its pertinence and its helpfulness in the decisions and the actions that we take day by day. We pray that in all things, our lives will reflect your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus.

We ask it in his name. Amen.