

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

A Model Church

1

Introduction

A strong church is a church of strong people, a people who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord and who are continuing steadfast in Him. This passage covers the traits of a strong people.

1. They received the Word of God as the Word of God (v. 13).
2. They became followers of strong churches: stood fast despite severe persecution (v. 14).
 3. They escaped the Jews' guilt (vv. 15–16).
 4. They possessed a strong fellowship (vv. 17–18).
5. They were destined to bring glory and joy to their ministers (vv. 19–20).

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1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. ¹⁴ For you, brethren, 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, just as they *did* from the Judeans, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, ¹⁶ forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of* their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. ¹⁷ But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. ¹⁸ Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

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Received the Word of God

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Paul was always thankful for the privilege of ministry, and he ceaselessly acknowledged God as the One who empowered the truth through him. He rehearses the **reason** he had to **thank God without ceasing**.

Note three things.

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1. The Thessalonian believers had received the Word through the preaching and teaching of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. It takes people to communicate the Word of God. God has entrusted us to go out and share the Truth of the Gospel. If we cease to speak, how will the world hear?

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2. The Thessalonian believers had received the Word not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God. Paul declares that the Gospel he proclaimed was not the word of men, but the Word of God Himself. He further adds that “it is in truth, the Word of God.”

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3. The Thessalonian believers received the Word so that it could work and operate in their lives. The verse says that it is God who works in us that believe. We need to evaluate what is it that we believe? If we do not believe the Word of God, there is nothing left to believe but the word of men.

7

Become Followers of Strong Churches

1 Thessalonians 2:14

For you, brethren, 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, just as they *did* from the Judeans.

A strong people become followers of strong churches. They stand fast in Christ despite trials, even when facing severe persecution. Note that it was their own countrymen who were persecuting them, both Jew and Gentile, but the instigators were the Jews (Acts 17:5).

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One of the strongest helps when facing persecution is to look to the example of others who have stood strong against opposition. This is what the Thessalonian believers did: they followed the example of the Judaeen churches. The faithfulness of both the Judaeen and Thessalonian believers stands as a strong example for us.

9

Escaped the Guilt of Unbelievers

1 Thessalonians 2:15-16

who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, ¹⁶forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

A strong church escapes the guilt of the unbelieving Jews. A person and/or church either stands in support of Christ or in opposition to Christ.

The Jewish persecutors stood in opposition to Christ, in opposition to God's very own Son. This persecution was done in the name of religion. But the Thessalonian church and its believers stood in support of Christ; therefore, they escaped the guilt that hangs over a person's head for opposing God's Son.

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Paul lists the sins of the unbelieving Judaizes.

1. **They killed the Lord Jesus.** Note the title “**Lord.**” They thought they were killing only a man, only a carpenter from Nazareth, but they were actually killing the Lord. By Lord is meant all that is included in the title: the Lord God, the One who came out of heaven itself, the very Son of God Himself.

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2. **They killed their own prophets.** This was a charge that has often been leveled at the Jews (Matthew 23:31; Acts 7:52).

3. **They persecuted Christian believers.** They not only rejected the gospel, but they wanted to destroy the message and those who followed and proclaimed it. They did not want anyone following Christ.

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4. They did not please God. No person can please God if he stands in opposition to Christ. The only way a person can please God is to surrender his life to Christ—to give all he is and has to Christ. The Jews were not about to do this. Nothing was going to break them away from their own religious ceremonies and ideas about religion.

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5. They were contrary to all men. They opposed and hated anyone who did not believe as they did so they shut them out. They should have loved those who differed, but instead they bitterly despised them. We are not to hate and oppose those who differ with us. We must love them and do all we can to reach out and help them come to know truth.

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6. They tried to stop the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles. They reject God's offer of salvation and did not want the Gentiles to be saved. It is one thing to reject God's Son yourself, but actively trying to impeded others from finding salvation, compounds their guilt.

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The results of all the Jews' efforts to stop God's Word was twofold.

First, that they continued to pile up their sins. They became full and even overflowed with sin. What a terrible indictment. The idea is they sinned so much that they reached the point of no return. There is a point when a person refuses to repent and turn to Jesus that God turns them over and allows their hearts to be hardened.

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Second, the wrath of God was to come upon them to the uttermost.

The judgment of God upon the unbelieving Jews was certain, for they had ...

- killed His Son, the Lord Jesus
 - killed His prophets
- persecuted His church followers
 - stood against all men
- tried to stamp out His Word so that other people might not be saved.

17

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Think for a moment: if Jesus Christ is truly God's Son, then the judgment of God upon the Jewish unbelievers is inevitable. In fact, His judgment upon any person or people who stands in opposition to Christ is inevitable. No man will be able to escape His judgment.

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Possess a Strong Fellowship

1 Thessalonians 2:17-18

But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.¹⁸ Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.

A strong church possesses a strong fellowship. The fellowship of the Thessalonians was so strong that Paul longed to return to them. The ache of Paul's heart for the Thessalonians and their fellowship is seen in his emphasis:

- ⇒ he had been taken from them in presence, but "not in heart."
- ⇒ he endeavored more eagerly to return.
- ⇒ he eagerly sought to return.
- ⇒ he sought to return with great desire.

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However, note: Paul's return to the Thessalonian believers had been hindered by Satan. The word **hindered** means to cut in a road; to make a road impassable. It means to put up a roadblock for the purpose of stopping an expedition.

We do not know how Satan hindered them, but we can see that the things going on in the Thessalonica church were a threat to Satan's kingdom!

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Bring Joy to Ministers

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it not even you* in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

A strong church is destined to bring glory and joy to their ministers. Paul clearly says that the Thessalonian believers were his hope and joy and crown of rejoicing. When? In the day when the Lord Jesus Christ will return and they will all stand in His presence.

Note the word crown is the victor's crown, the crown worn by the athlete after he has won the contest. The picture is that we are in a contest, a spiritual struggle against Satan for the souls of men.

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So What ...

We live in the midst of spiritual warfare. We need to remember that the battle is being fought over the souls of those around us - our children, family members, and friends. We need to have to speak truth since their eternal destinies hang in the balance.

We look forward to the return of Jesus. All else will fade away in the "grand reunion". Let's live with eternity in view.

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