

WAITING FOR THE LORD'S RETURN, PART 2: "GOSPEL-CENTERED LIVES"

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-16

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Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, I'm Jeff - one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta. And it's my privilege to be preaching the Word of God for us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

Last week, we just started a new sermon series on the books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, called "Waiting for the Lord's Return." Today, we'll be continuing with Part 2, titled "Gospel-centered Lives."

Before we get started, let me pray for us again...

Sermon Introduction

Now, have you ever been to a convention?

Maybe an anime convention? Or a video games convention or a convention for business leaders, or technology, or education, or maybe it was for something else?

If you've ever gone to one of these conventions then you've noticed that each convention is centered around 1 specific theme. And it's actually quite amazing to see a large number of people all gathered for that one specific thing (whatever it may be).

Yesterday... I went to one of these conventions. And for those who went, it's quite obvious what the theme is...

You could've gone there blindfolded without knowing anything! And if you observe what's actually there and what's happening... you could easily tell what the convention was centered on...

- Because you see that there's multiple vendors from different hotels & restaurants.
- And various vendors selling cake.
- And vendors for photography, and suits & dresses...

You could just tell that it's a *wedding* convention. Everything was built and centered on that 1 thing.

Now... if someone were to somehow do the same thing for you and look into your life & observe what you've done, what you're planning to do, how you make your decisions... then what would they say would be the one thing that your life is built & centered on?

Today, we'll see that Apostle Paul's life was centered on the Gospel of Jesus Christ... what he's done, what he's planning to do, how he makes his decisions... it was all for the Gospel and it's because his greatest desire is to please God.

So as God's people, would others say the same thing about our lives? If they're to observe how we live, would they say that our lives are centered on the Gospel and that our desire is to please God?

The One Thing

As God's people, let's live Gospel-centered lives that are pleasing to God.

Scripture Introduction

If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16.

For context - Thessalonica was one of the major cities in Macedonia (which is present-day Greece). And it's one of the cities that Paul went to in one of his missionary journeys, as he started the first church there.

But after only 3 weeks in Thessalonica, he was forced to leave the city amidst persecution from the unbelieving Jews there who had formed a hostile mob (Acts 17:1-10).

So then after some time away from them, Paul writes a letter to them (what we now know as the book of 1 Thessalonians). The purpose of Paul's letter here is to encourage them - this young church that's less than 1 year old - to continue to grow in their faith and in their godliness in light of the hope they have in Jesus' second coming...

Scripture Reading

So let's read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 (ESV)

¹ For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

⁹ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how,

like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. ¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind ¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

This is God's Word.

Overview

What does it look like to live Gospel-centered lives?

- I. Not pleasing man, but pleasing God (vv. 1-4)
- II. Not using others to build up yourself, but using your life to build up others (vv. 5-12)
- III. Not hindering others, but helping others to hear the Word of God (vv. 13-16)

I. Not pleasing man, but pleasing God (vv. 1-4)

When we read each of Paul's letters, it's important to understand the *context* of what's going on during that time.

- And one of the things that we can do to better understand the context is to go through the letter itself and then based on the *content* and *tone* of his letter... we can then conclude what may be happening during that time.

In this case, verses 1 and 3 can give us hints here of what's happening at Thessalonica when Paul wrote this letter.

- Take a look at verse 1 - Paul is reminding the Thessalonians that his time with them was not in vain.
 - "Vain" here means empty.
 - So Paul is reminding them that the 3 weeks they spent together was not empty... it wasn't meaningless.
- And then in verse 3, Paul reminds them that his motive in sharing the Gospel with them was also not empty - it was not impure, and he wasn't trying to deceive them.

So what Paul is basically doing here is that he's defending himself; defending his character & his ministry in Thessalonica.

So then that tells us that there might've been people during that time who were slandering Paul! So that Paul needs to defend himself.

Perhaps they're saying how Paul himself was *empty* in character...

- Maybe his credibility was put into question. Because at this time, Paul technically had a criminal record. Before going to Thessalonica, he was imprisoned in Philippi for sharing the Gospel. And he was beaten and whipped. And so when he came to Thessalonica, maybe he still had some of those scars. So he might not have looked like a teacher based on his outside appearance.
- And maybe his teaching was also being questioned. Maybe they're saying how his Gospel message is just *empty* words.
- And maybe some also said, "Look! Look at how he just left you guys! He didn't care for you!"
- So Paul's character, his Gospel message, and his care... all might've been questioned.

And to make matters a bit more complicated, it was common for traveling teachers and philosophers at the time to just pass through cities to preach and make money. And some of these teachers wouldn't even care about the truth - they just argue and say whatever the people wanted to hear to gain their favor. Because that would mean more fans and more followers. And that means more power and influence and more money. And unfortunately, it wasn't uncommon for these traveling teachers to also take advantage of their power & influence to have sex with their fans & followers. So some had impure motives - they're doing it for their own fame, power, riches, and pleasure.

So here, in verse 3, Paul is distinguishing himself apart from those other people that they might've correlated him with. He's not like them. And his Gospel message is not like theirs.

- Look at verse 3 - Paul defends that his Gospel proclamation does not spring from error - It is not indifferent to the truth. He doesn't go back and forth just to get people's approval. He cares about sharing the truth of God's Word regardless of what people will think of him.
- And his Gospel proclamation does not attempt to *deceive* - He's not tricking people to try and get them to be his fans. And he's not trying to hide anything about the Gospel to make it sound like something it's not, so that more people would like him.
- And his Gospel proclamation does not spring from *impurity* (Now, Paul usually uses this word to refer to sexual impurity). So Paul is making it clear that he's not doing it for impure motives - for his own pleasures.
 - Look at verse 2 - Paul reminds them of what happened to him in Philippi - how he was abused, and how he suffered, and was shamefully treated there. Yet he still made his way to Thessalonica to continue to preach the Gospel boldly in the midst of persecution.
 - If he's in it for himself... for impure motives; for his own pleasures... then he wouldn't be sharing the Gospel. He'd do something else that wouldn't cause him any trouble.

Big question: Then why does Paul do what he does? If it's not for fame, power, riches, and pleasure (like most of the traveling teachers)... Why does he continue to proclaim the Gospel even amidst persecution?

- Look at verse 4 - Because his motivation is not that he's trying to please man. He's trying to please God!
- If he's trying to please man, he'd stop proclaiming the Gospel long ago at the first sign of trouble. But because he's not doing it to please others, he continues to proclaim and defend the Gospel even amidst persecution...

Even him defending himself here is not for his own sake, but for the sake of the Gospel. Because if Paul was discredited, then the Gospel message itself would also be discredited.

And so here we get a glimpse of Paul's heart and what motivates him to do what he does.

- It's because he wants to please God.

<pause>

So this makes me ask myself: why do we do what we do? What motivates us?

For a lot of us, maybe we do what we do in order to please others...

- What we say, how we act, what we wear, what we do... maybe some of us are doing it to please others (or even to please one particular person).
- I'll be the first to admit this. My tendency is to want to please others. So I'm not only speaking to you, but I'm also speaking to myself here...
 - So I also need to ask myself: Why? Why do I want to please others?
 - Maybe so they'd like me... and because it feels good to be liked by others; to have their approval and to get recognition from them.
 - It feels good when we get those likes on our Instagram posts.
- And wanting to be liked by others is not necessarily a bad thing. After all, we're made to be in community and in relationship with one another & to enjoy one another's friendship.
 - But... because of the sin in our hearts we can twist whatever good into something bad...
 - "I like to be liked" becomes... "I NEED to be liked."
 - And so we try to control how others perceive us based on what we say, how we act, what we wear, what we do...
 - And then our lives start to revolve and be centered - not on God or His Gospel - but on pleasing others. And we begin to idolize others' approval - placing it at a higher position than God.
 - And that dishonors God.
 - And it's actually suffocating for us too because we'll find out sooner or later that it's impossible to please everyone...

But here's the thing... the phrase "pleasing others" is actually not very accurate.

- Because our sinful tendency to please others may actually be because we want something from them.
 - Maybe to gain approval from family members & friends, so that we feel approved.
 - Maybe to gain praise from our spouse, so we feel worthy.
 - Maybe to gain favor from our boss and co-workers, so we can later get something from them in return.
 - Ultimately, it's about "me" - And that others' approval says something about my identity and my value and my worth.

- So actually “pleasing others” is actually more like “pleasing self.” And people-pleasers are more like self-pleasers.
 - And those who idolize others’ approval may actually be idolizing one’s own self-image or reputation instead.

But we also need to acknowledge that not everyone’s tendency is to please others. So you may not feel like you’re naturally a people-pleaser; your tendency may not be to care about what others think of you.

- But maybe it’s because you’re actually desiring approval or praise from *yourself* (trying to meet a certain standard that you’ve set for yourself).
- But ultimately, it’s still that same tendency to please someone (even if that someone is yourself).

<pause>

That’s why Paul’s desire here is so admirable. He’s trying to please God! Not trying to please man (not trying to please others; not trying to please himself).

- Because to him, he doesn’t need others’ approval.

Why not? Look at verse 4 again - He doesn’t need others’ approval because he’s already approved by God Himself!

Now that’s a bold bold statement! He can’t even say that everyone in Philippi & Thessalonica approves of Him. How can he confidently say that he’s approved by the almighty God?

Friends, it’s because of the Gospel message that he’s been carrying and treasuring, and proclaiming and sharing with others! It’s because of the Gospel message that he’s defending amidst persecution - that’s what’s giving him confidence.

What is this Gospel?

The Gospel is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

- The Good News is that God knows that we’re sinners - that we’re prone to please ourselves and others, instead of Him - yet, He still chose to love us and to save us.
- What did God save us from? As sinners, we’ve all fallen short of God’s perfect standard of righteousness. None of us are worthy of His approval. So as unworthy sinners, what we justly deserve for our sins; for turning away from the eternal God... is eternal punishment in Hell. That’s what we ALL justly deserve. That’s the bad news.
- Yet, God still chose to love us. He sent His one and only son, Jesus Christ - who is fully God and fully man. Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life that we could not - and so he’s the only one worthy & approved of God’s perfect standard.
- And Jesus died on the cross as our substitute in our place, taking on the punishment that we deserved. He died for our sins (not for his own, for he had none).

- And now for those who believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, our sins are forgiven. And God has graciously counted Jesus' righteousness as our own. So now when God sees us, he sees Jesus' righteousness covering us, and so we are approved as His righteous people.
- So that means that those who put their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, will not be punished in Hell, but will have eternal life in Heaven! That's the Good News! That's the Gospel!

This is why Paul is so confident that he's approved by God. Not because he had to earn God's approval but because God has already given him His approval because of Jesus.

So if you've not yet put your faith in Christ - and you're still trying to earn others' approval - I invite you to know the God who already approved His people because of Jesus. Please come talk to me or others around you after the service, and we'd love to talk to you more about Jesus.

And for those of us who've already placed our faith in Jesus, then we can also be confident like Paul that we've already been approved by God. So you do not need to earn others' approval because... your identity, your value, and your worth is already secured in Jesus. You're worth so much to God and He loves you so much that He gave Himself for your sake.

Look, one more time, to verse 4 - To those whom God has approved, he's entrusted the Gospel.

- And so God entrusted the Gospel to Paul (and to us believers).
- And what are we to do with the Gospel? Jesus taught his disciples to live out the Gospel, to proclaim the Gospel to others and to make disciples.

And that's what Paul and the first disciples did. Not because they're trying to please man (or else they would've stopped sharing the Gospel long ago). But because they're so *thankful* and in *awe* of the God who's already approved them. That their motivation is transformed and is now about loving and pleasing this God who loved them first. And we see that their desire to please God led to them living Gospel-centered lives.

- So what they say, how they live, what they do... it's now all centered and based on the Gospel.

And we'll see more of what that looks like next...

What does it look like to live Gospel-centered lives?

- First - Not pleasing man, but pleasing God.
- Second...

II. Not using others to build up yourself, but using your life to build up others (vv. 5-12)

In verses 5-12, Paul continues to defend himself (again, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the Gospel). Because if he was discredited, then the Gospel itself would be discredited.

And it seems like some people were trying to discredit him, and maybe they're saying, "Hey, Thessalonians! Paul didn't really care for you! He's only using you! He cared only for himself! Look at how quickly he left the city!"

So Paul now reminds them of the *genuine* care that he has for them.

Look at verses 5-6 - Paul again separates himself from the other traveling teachers and philosophers.

- Because unlike some of them, Paul was not there to use the Thessalonians to build up himself for his own gain.
- He did not come with words of *flattery* - He didn't try to influence their emotions with his compliments, so he'll have many fans..
- He did not come seeking *glory* or praises from them - He's not using them to further his own ambitions and power.
- He did not come with an ulterior motive for *greed* or for money - He's not using them so that he'll get rich.
 - In fact, look at verse 9 - Paul reminds them that he worked night and day, so that he'd be able to feed himself and not be a burden to the Thessalonians. Paul wanted to make sure that the Thessalonians were able to hear the Gospel message for free.
 - He's not like the other traveling teachers who may be using them in order to build themselves up.

Paul knows that that kind of life would not align with the Gospel message that he proclaims. A self-serving life is actually anti-Gospel.

- Because the Gospel is that Jesus gave himself up for us; for our sake!
 - Jesus spent his ministry on Earth caring for others, healing others, teaching others, building up others & encouraging them to live lives that are honoring to God!
 - Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve. And he gave up his life for us on the cross.
- So in light of the Gospel, Paul is also using his life to serve & build up others - like Lord Jesus.

And we'll see Paul describe two pictures here of what it looks like to use your life to build up others:

- (1) To build up others like a caring mother (vv. 5-9)
- (2) To build up others like an encouraging father (vv. 10-12)

II. Not using others to build up yourself, but using your life to build up others (vv. 5-12)

A. Like a caring mother (vv. 5-9)

B. Like an encouraging father (vv. 10-12)

A. Like a caring mother (vv. 5-9)

Look at the end of verse 6 to verse 7 - Paul reminded the Thessalonians that as an Apostle of Christ, he had a certain level of authority over them, and he could've exercised that authority when he was with them. But... he intentionally did not.

Instead... he was gentle with them. Just like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

Just imagine that picture of a nursing mother caring for the children whom she loves... It's quite a different picture compared to the traveling teachers who take advantage of their fans & followers, expecting something in return from them.

A nursing mother is the one sacrificing her life (giving her time, energy, and efforts) to take care of her baby.

- Because a baby can't do much in return for the mom - cannot help earn money (if anything, requires more money); cannot help with chores (if anything, creates more chores)... yet the mom continues to take care of the baby even though the baby can't do much in return. Why?
 - Those who are moms may already know the answer.
 - It's because of the deep love that a mom has for her child. She's already chosen to love her child while the child was still in her womb. Even before she knows how the baby is gonna look like or what he/she would do... the baby is already loved.
 - And it's the same for moms who decide to adopt a child. Even before the child knows of the mom, even before they meet for the first time, the mom has already chosen to love the child as if he/she was her own.

Look at verse 8 - Paul says it's because of this kind of motherly love that he has for the Thessalonians... that he's not using them for his own gain, but he's sharing with them - not only the Gospel message - but his own life to them (his time, energy, and efforts). For the sake of building them up as if they're his own spiritual children.

<pause>

Brothers and sisters, is this the kind of love that we have for one another as a church family? As brothers and sisters in Christ? Do we choose to love one another in this way? Even when others can't do much for us in return?

Or do we only love others when they're easy to love? Only when it doesn't require too much work, labor, and toil?

But then what happens when there's conflict between us, and when it's not easy to love each other? What happens when other church members are driving us crazy?

Paul seems to be hinting here that loving others is not always going to be easy. It's going to require us sacrificially giving up ourselves... it's going to require work; it's going to require labor & toil... and it's going to require gentleness... and motherly care.

But when we choose to love each other in this way, God is the one glorified. Because we exemplify Jesus and his Gospel - Because Jesus is the one who labored for us on the cross, and he gave us the perfect example of how it looks like to sacrificially love others. So may we also live out the Gospel by sacrificially giving up ourselves for others just as Christ did for us.

How would it look like for you to sacrificially love others today?

- Maybe to be the one to humble yourself and apologize for something that you've done...
- Maybe to be the one to reach out to someone even if they're the ones who've hurt you...
- How would it look like for you to exemplify Jesus' sacrifice to others?

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If you'd like to read more about this topic, one book I'd recommend for us to read is "Love the Ones Who Drive You Crazy" by Jamie Dunlop

- This book is available to borrow for free in our digital library (so you can start reading it this week if you'd like!)
- This book describes how we're to love one another as church members - even those members who are not easy to love! And maybe that's all of us - including me!
- This is part of the labor of love that God has called us to live out!

B. Like an encouraging father (vv. 10-12)

Let's look at verses 10-12 - Paul then gives another picture of how we're to build up others... this time... like an encouraging father.

Because just like how the father is to be the spiritual leader of his family (thinking about his family members' eternal well-being), Paul also has the Thessalonians' eternal well-being in mind.

He truly cares about their followership of Christ, and their relationship with God! And he truly desires for them to be more sanctified, and shaped more and more like Christ in character.

And so he exhorted, encouraged, and charged the Thessalonians to walk in a manner worthy of God.

Look at verse 10 - Paul reminds them that he's not teaching them to do something he's not doing himself. For he's also faithfully walking in a manner worthy of God. Because Paul's conduct toward them have been:

- *Holy, righteous, and blameless* - He's been above reproach; this doesn't mean that he lived a perfectly sinless life, but it means that he gave them no reason to question his character (he was very intentional with his actions - like how he worked and made his own money, teaching them for free - so that there'd be no reasonable excuse for anyone to accuse him of greed).

And now, the Thessalonians are to do the same. As God's people who've been saved by the Gospel and entrusted with the Gospel, they're to live holy, righteous, and blameless lives.

- Not because they need to do those things in order to be saved. But in order to please the God who's already saved them!
- Because when we live that way, we're glorifying God's very own character because God is the one completely holy, righteous and blameless.

So then how about us as God's people? How can we help each other to do this? How can we exhort, encourage, and charge one another to walk in a manner worthy of God?

- Well, how does God exhort, encourage, and charge His people?
 - Through His Word!

God chooses to communicate with us using words. Scripture has many words that encourages & charges us to live holy, righteous, blameless lives.

- Practically... Use your words.
- Use your words to point others to God's Word - which is powerful and pierces through hearts and consciences.
- At the same time, also be aware that your words have power too and can greatly affect people.
 - Look at what God's Word says about the power of our words...
 - James 3:4-5a (ESV)

⁴ Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.
 - Words are powerful. Like a very small rudder that can change the direction of a large ship. Your words can greatly affect people's lives.
 - Your words can be used to encourage, and build up others.
 - Or your words can be used to bring others down, hurting them.
 - Your words can be so powerful that you can change someone's day, or week, or month by your words. And your words can linger in people's minds - for better or worse.

How will you use your words?

- Parents, how are you using words to build up your children?
- Teens and children, how are you using your words to build up your parents and your friends?
- Husbands and wives, how are you using your words to build up each other?
- Church members, how are you using your words to build up one another?

As we invest in each other, I think we'll find that as you build others up, God will also use that to build you up as well, as you then continue to mature as a follower of Christ.

So let's aim to please God by using our lives (our time, energy, and our words) to build up one another... with gentleness, care, and with encouragement.

What does it look like to live Gospel-centered lives?

- First - Not pleasing man, but pleasing God.
- Second - Not using others to build up yourself, but using your life to build up others.
- Finally...

III. Not hindering others, but helping others to hear the Word of God (vv. 13-16)

Look at verse 13 - In light of Paul's love and care for the Thessalonians, he gives thanks to God when he sees that the Thessalonians have grown as believers...

- Paul sees evidence of their growth because they've truly received the Gospel not merely as the words of men (not merely Paul's own words), but the Word of God.
- And because it's truly the Word of God, it's working powerfully in their hearts... to the point where...

... Look at verse 14 - To the point where the Thessalonians are willing to live out the Gospel even amidst suffering; even as they're being persecuted by their own countrymen (by the other citizens of Thessalonica).

- We know from Acts 17 that believers were being dragged from their house by an angry mob, and they had to pay bond (who knows how much they're forced to pay). It was costly for the Thessalonians to follow Jesus!
- Yet they still followed him, and continued to persevere in their hope in Christ even amidst suffering!
 - By doing that, they've imitated the first churches in Judea (including the first church in Jerusalem) who also endured persecution from their own people.
 - But because of that, they've proven that their faith in Jesus is tested & genuine.

Here we see a glimpse of the fruit of Paul's labor. His work; his ministry was not "empty."

Not only was Paul himself not empty as a person, but the Gospel message he carries was not just empty words (because it was the Word of God Himself), and so his work there was also not empty & without fruit. The Thessalonians themselves are proof that his ministry was not in vain; was not empty, but fruitful!

Brothers and sisters, this is also what we hope to see as we live Gospel-centered lives. That as we live lives that are pleasing to God and as we share the Gospel with others... that God would be working *in* and *through* us... That more and more people would see that the Bible is not merely man-made, but the very Word of God Himself.

So here we see that when we live Gospel-centered lives, we can have a *huge impact* on other people's lives, and on the world around us!

I personally can testify that this is absolutely true - because I came to truly know Christ as my Lord and Savior... at HMCC. This is where I became a Christian. This is where God placed me, and discipled me and encouraged me through many brothers and sisters here.

- And I believe that I'm not alone. Others have also come to know Christ and have grown in their followership of Christ in this church. So we're the proof ourselves that our work and ministry as a church is not in vain; it is not empty. Praise God for that!
- And I hope that we can continue to be used by God to bless many other lives in our church, in our city and in Indonesia (and perhaps around the world).

So brothers and sisters, let's continue to build up one another, and let's continue to live out the Gospel and to proclaim it to others!

So who can we share the Gospel with this week? Perhaps to a non-Christian family member, a friend, a co-worker? Let's pray for the opportunities to have spiritual conversations & to share the Gospel with them this upcoming week.

And let's trust that the Holy Spirit will be working in their hearts. And so *if* and *when* we see fruit, let's give thanks to God because He's the one who's doing the work in our hearts.

<pause>

Now, let's look at verse 15 - We see the opposite example now of how it looks like to - not help - but to hinder someone from hearing God's Word.

The unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem have been hindering people from hearing God's Word for quite some time - they killed the prophets who were speaking on God's behalf, they killed Jesus (who is God himself), and they persecuted & drove out the apostles & the other disciples there, preventing them from proclaiming God's Word to others.

And look at how it's described when you "hinder someone from hearing God's Word." It's described here as being... *displeasing* to God AND *opposing* mankind.

Opposing *mankind* - not only opposing 1 or 2 people, but when you hinder someone from hearing the Gospel, you're hindering ALL of mankind! Why is that?

Look at verse 16 - Because the Gospel is the *only* way that someone can be saved from their sins. So those who are hindering others from hearing the Gospel have hindered them from the only way that they may have salvation. And so, they themselves will face God's holy wrath on that final day of judgment.

<pause>

So just as pointing others to Christ is a serious matter that's *pleasing* to God, pointing others away from Christ (hindering them) is also a serious matter that's *displeasing* to God.

So how have we been living our lives? Have we been hindering others from the Gospel?

- Maybe you haven't persecuted or harmed any Christians for their faith, but have you hindered others from the Gospel by the way you've lived your life?
- Does your life look more like a Non-Christian's than as a Christian's?
 - That when others see you, they question what difference it makes to be Christian... because they don't see anything different about you...
 - Would you think that others (including Non-Christians would describe you as impure in motives? Or greedy? Or seeking glory from others? Or that you're not gentle? Not encouraging? DO you think there's a possibility that that's how others see you?
 - That when they see your life, it drives them away from Christianity.

Because what we see here is that Paul is very intentional with the way that he's lived his life. He's even aware of the negative ways that people can see his ministry as a traveling teacher. So he's very intentional in the way that he lives his life. And how he proclaims the Gospel with his words AND with his life!

So this makes me question... we all have different lives (including different professions). So based on what you do & your field of work... I wonder what are some of the things that we need to be careful and mindful of as Christians.

For example, if we work in business...

- As a business owner, what are some of the negative ways that employers have been known to treat their employees?
- Or as an employee, what are some of the harmful things that commonly happen in the office that would not please God? Perhaps gossip? Maybe mistreating newer employees? I'm not sure...

But maybe it'd be helpful to intentionally think about these things that could inadvertently be associated with us... so that our lives wouldn't be questioned & discredited (which would possibly lead to the Gospel being discredited).

So let's take some time tonight to intentionally think of all aspects of our lives. Together, let's aim to intentionally live Gospel-centered lives that are pleasing to God!

- And, again, not doing these things because we think that we need to earn God's approval.
- But because He's already given us His approval because of Jesus Christ.
- And so it's out of a heart of thanksgiving and worship... that we desire to live Gospel-centered lives to please our God.

Again, what does it look like to live Gospel-centered lives?

- First - Not pleasing man, but pleasing God.
- Second - Not using others to build up yourself, but using your life to build up others.
- Third - Not hindering others, but helping others to hear the Word of God.

And in all we do, may it honor and please our God, who's the only one worthy of our lives.

The One Thing

As God's people, let's live Gospel-centered lives that are pleasing to God.

Let's pray.