



SUFFERING FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

Week #11; Aug. 9, 2026, 11AM

Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
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SUMMARY: “SUFFERING FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST” – “In 1 Thessalonians Ch. 2:14-16, Paul provides some specific accounts of suffering within the church. In this passage, we see that God allows this persecution and suffering to reinforce in His faithful saints an accurate view of this life, as well as the one to come. He has a purpose behind all the challenges we face.”

REVIEW:

- Last week, in our current study of **1 Thessalonians**, we studied what it meant to have a right response to God’s Word.
- It was because Paul remarked in **Ch. 2 vs. 13**, that he was especially thankful these new believers “*received the word of God....not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God.*”
- That seems to be a simple concept, but it’s a profound one at the same time. In fact, as we learned, it’s the bedrock foundation to our faith.
- And so, we explored the fundamentals of God’s Word: the inerrancy, authority, and completeness of it.
- We saw how the Bible, being a direct reflection of its Divine Author, exposes what we really think about God Himself. Our response and regard for God’s Word is a direct indicator of our response **TO** and regard **FOR** God.
- If we choose to treat God’s Word casually – then that is how we are choosing to treat God. If we disrespect the Bible, and we choose to mistrust it or doubt it – then that is how we feel about God too. We cannot separate these things.
- Last week’s lesson was a solid review of many fundamentals, but I think it was a great reminder for many of us to stay true to Scripture, and to give it the respect it is due.

NOTE: This week, we transition into **vss. 14-16 of Ch. 2**, and we explore what it means to ‘suffer for the cause of Christ’ (**READ**):

NOTE: Some high-altitude thoughts and observations

1. **First**, Paul lets this little group of true believers know they are not alone in what they are experiencing.
 - This is a word of encouragement to this little body of Christians because Paul helps them to see a bigger picture. He says they are not alone in their struggles.

- Often, when we are dealing with trials and with challenges, it boosts our endurance to know we are not alone - - it helps to know others are facing the same things we are facing.
 - Paul's words here are therapeutic in that respect. These new believers in Thessalonica are enduring the trenches of spiritual warfare, just like other good soldiers of Christ are also enduring.
 - This is one of the purposes of being part of a body of believers. We are called to "*bear one another's burdens*" in **Galatians 6:2**. That's a benefit of good fellowship.
 - Paul adds a greater perspective here. They are not alone! They are part of a collective calling which is "*in Christ Jesus*" (**Cf. vs. 14**).
2. **Second**, Paul gets more specific about how they are responding to the challenges and sufferings they are facing.
- He clarifies that these Thessalonian believers are in fact, '*imitators*' of others' Godly example.
 - When we are enduring the sufferings and trials of living out our Christian life...
 - ...it should strengthen us to know we are imitating what is right,
 - ...it should encourage us when we know we are imitating what is proper,
 - ...and it should inspire us to know we are imitating others who have set a Godly example.
 - **Eph. 5:1-2** instructs us to be '*imitators of God*.' Paul said he imitated Christ in **1 Cor. 11:1**, and he also instructed others to imitate him.
 - Now, here in **1 Thess. 2:14**, Paul commends these new believers for the way they imitated "*God's churches....which are IN Christ Jesus*."
 - We'll unpack this point more in a bit – but for now, it's a good and worthy thing to IMITATE what is right and what is proper.
3. Then **third**, for the true believer, there is always a bigger picture to our suffering and our trials.
- Paul specifies in **vs. 16** that there is more going on than 'meets the eye.'
 - We'll probe this issue a couple of different ways later in this lesson, but it is often the case that our physical challenges reflect a spiritual situation.
 - I want to be careful here to specify that I am focused on those sufferings and persecutions which are the result of **the cause of Christ**.
 - We all have challenges which have nothing to do with **the cause of Christ**. They may have a lot to do with living in a fallen and sinful world, but that does not necessarily mean they are associated with a commitment to **faithful endurance in one direction**.
 - Again, I want to stay focused on the truth that our physical challenges often reflect a spiritual situation.

- Daniel prayed earnestly in **Dan. Ch. 9**, confessing his sins and the sins of his people. He was deeply distraught and burdened.
- When an angel came in response to his prayer, Daniel learned that there was a spiritual conflict behind the scenes that was connected to the things he was praying about.
- What happens in this **visible** dimension is often – not always, but often - an indication of things that are happening in the **invisible** dimension.

NOTE: With those high-altitude things helping to set a tone here, I want to take the rest of this lesson to unpack a pragmatic and application-oriented three-point outline.

This brief outline is a roadmap of coping skills in a way. It should help us focus on the basics we need to give some attention to. My hope is this will help us gain a new perspective on **suffering for the cause of Christ (three “I’s”)**:

1. IMITATE those who are doing what’s right
2. IMPLICATE those who are causing the pain
3. ISOLATE those who are doing what’s wrong

NOTE: These are three action verbs. There is nothing passive about any of them. They are all choices and – BTW - none of them are easy. But they are all an essential part of helping each other when we are **suffering for the cause of Christ**.

A. IMITATE those who are doing what’s right

1. In **vs. 14**, Paul is quite clear. He compliments this new Thessalonian church for how it has imitated other **good** churches.

- These other good churches are in Judea. They are more established and more proven churches. They’re older and they’ve got a longer track record.
- But they’ve experienced the same thing. They’ve endured the same sufferings. They are further along in some respects, but they are otherwise the same.
- Paul says in **vs. 14**, *“You suffered from your own countrymen,”* (that would be the Greeks) and then he adds, *“those churches suffered from the Jews.”*
- There are a couple key points to be made here: **first**, we’re often hurt the most by those who are closest to us.
 - It’s common that those we rub shoulders with, those we have served and fellowshiped alongside, those we are most familiar with, and those who know us best - - are also those who seem to cause our greatest pain and suffering.
 - Paul’s larger point here is *“You’re on track. You’re doing a good thing. You’re following the example of others who have done what’s right.”*
- **Second**, it’s precisely these sorts of attacks and misunderstandings that often show we are being faithful to things that are *“in Christ Jesus” (Cf. vs. 14)*.

- **2 Tim. 3:12** reminds us that “*All who live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*”
- There’s a condition and there’s a consequence. **Condition:** “*live Godly in Christ Jesus,*” **Consequence:** “*suffer persecution.*”
- It’s a principle of Scripture that those who faithfully endure in one direction will earn criticism and maltreatment from those who are not faithfully enduring the same way.
- People don’t want to be exposed for being incorrect, for having the wrong views, and for wanting to believe and do things they should not believe and do.
- For such folks, it’s much easier to attack YOU than work on changing something about THEMSELVES.
- For one who is self-centered and is not controlled by the Holy Spirit the way they need to be – there is no ‘defense;’ there is only ‘offense.’

2. We can imitate a lot of different things and a lot of different people.

- It depends on ‘who’ or ‘what’ you are. In this case, in **2 Thess. 2:14**, Paul compliments this church for imitating other good churches.
 - (Let me say) that’s getting harder to do these days. Many churches that were once strong in the fundamentals are now weak in the same.
 - Many churches are gradually succumbing to ‘woke’ pressures, to their need to conform to ever-constricting 501(c)(3) expectations, and to their own ambitions to be ‘attractive to the lost.’
 - Many churches today are diluting God’s Word to gain more ‘nickels and noses.’ They spend more effort trying to come up with creative means to get folks in the door than to teach them properly once they’re inside.
 - From the standpoint of the modern church, the ‘*broad road that leads to destruction*’ has more potential customers on it.
 - But none of these things are Biblical. All of them are institutional. The problem is most people today have elevated ‘Church culture’ to near-theological status.
 - (And so) Paul reminds these Thessalonian believers that **this** issue is not their problem. Instead, **they** are doing what is right.
 - They are sticking to the fundamentals. They are staying true to what is “*in Christ Jesus*” – and for doing what is right, they are experiencing suffering and persecution.
 - I had a meeting this past week with a pastor that I’ve been trying to get to know for a long while now. I sensed he and I were on the same page – and it’s been an effort to connect.
 - Well, we finally did. And what was to be a short meeting lasted several hours. We had a great time. Neither of us had realized how much we had in common.
 - We are both eager to get together again and visit more. It was not unlike the dynamic of Paul’s message to these Thessalonian believers; he and

I found mutual encouragement in the similar trials and sufferings we each faced.

- Yesterday, I had a long talk with a very prominent scholar and teacher in Bible prophecy.
- Again – what we both thought would be a short talk turned into something more extended. We found encouragement in the similar views we each shared, and the misunderstandings we each faced.
- Paul's bigger point is "STAY TRUE TO WHAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS."
 - That's not easy to do. It requires we return to and stick to God's Word. As Chris Christian (a great pioneer in CCM) once sang, "*Get Back to the Bible.*"
 - This is where quality fellowship comes in. We need support from each other to help us through suffering and persecution.
 - We need to come alongside each other "*in Christ Jesus,*" help each other to persevere "*in Christ Jesus,*" and assist the body to stay on the right track "*in Christ Jesus.*"
 - (and this leads to the next point in this outline). We need to....

B. IMPLICATE those who are causing the pain

1. This is not easy to do, and it can be a delicate matter. Be that so, we see that Paul did not back away from this awkward and uncomfortable task.
 - Part of dealing with our challenges and our suffering **for the cause of Christ** is being able to recognize WHO is causing our problems, WHAT they are doing, and WHY they are doing it.
 - The simple reality is we live in a fallen world, and Satan often uses the weaker vessels to cause problems for the stronger vessels.
 - That's precisely what is happening in this passage we are studying today. The Jews attacked the churches in Judea. The Greeks attacked the church in Thessalonica.
 - Those who were **not** in a proper relationship with Jesus Christ caused problems for those who **were** "*in Christ Jesus.*"
 - Those who did not want the effective ministry of a body of believers, those who did not want the truth of God's Word plainly declared, those who took offense to others who were demonstrating they were "*in Christ Jesus*" - - chose to criticize them, attack them, persecute them, and do all they could to discourage them.
 - It's no different today than it was then in Paul's time. As we learned a few weeks ago when we were studying the **marks of a true ministry** a few verses back, strong opposition is always an ingredient.
 - But Paul goes an extra step here, and I want you to see it. He IMPLICATES those who are causing the pain.
 - To 'implicate' something or someone is to show they are involved. It means to make a connection between that person or thing, and something else.

- Paul does that here. He says, “There are problems with the churches in Judea, and the Jews there are causing the suffering.”
- He makes the connection. He implicates those who wanted to cling to tradition, to culture, and to the Mosaic laws instead of clinging to the grace that we have “*in Christ Jesus.*”
- Then he does the same thing with the Thessalonian church. He says, “Your own countrymen are doing the very same things to you.”
- It’s been often said that “Part of dealing with your problem is admitting you have one.”
 - The principle is you cannot deal with things you need to address and overcome until you first acknowledge those things exist.
 - That’s really the same principle here. Paul says, “You’ve got a problem. Here’s what’s going on, and here’s who’s causing it.”
 - He implicates the troublemakers. He calls them out. He identifies them.
 - This underscores a massive dilemma in the greater church today. There is almost zero discipline or accountability as the Bible specifies those things need to take place.
 - We live in a litigious culture. Folks **inside** the church are just as likely to sue and demand their personal rights as folks **outside** the church.
 - There is no difference in motive or action between the two groups because there is no true difference of heart between them.
 - I believe many people in the church are not truly saved, and this shows up – in large part – by how they choose to act and react. They are happy to **pretend** they are obedient until they are called to **be** obedient.
- Paul sees what’s going on here, and so he ‘calls a spade a spade.’
 - Now, I’m not saying that we always need to publicly call out those who have wronged us, who have unfairly attacked or disparaged us, or anything like that.
 - In fact, sometimes it’s best to do nothing. **Proverbs 19:11** says, “*A person’s wisdom yields patience; it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.*”
 - It’s a mark of personal maturity to exercise patience, to stay quiet about problems, and to seek peace.
 - Two motorists, going in opposite directions, met in the middle of a one-lane bridge. The first yelled, “I never back up for an idiot.” The second shifted into reverse and said, “I do.”
 - Paul makes the point there is a balancing act. Sometimes, when the ministry of God’s work is at stake, we need to **implicate** those who are causing the pain. This may be necessary to preserve the larger goals and ambitions of serving and growing “*in Christ Jesus.*”

NOTE: I want to make a few personal comments here:

- ✓ As SBC has grown and increased in its impact and ministry, so have all the nuances, responsibilities, distractions, and hurdles.
- ✓ With this growth have also come increased attacks and misunderstandings. With this expansion of the ministry of SBC, there are more oppositions and persecutions.
- ✓ These challenges take many forms, and I am aware of them. Some of you seem to feel it's your personal calling to keep me **VERY** informed of all the 'dust bunnies' you find.
- ✓ In my position, I need to keep things 'under wraps.' I am told a lot of sensitive things which I need to keep in confidence. It's part of doing what I do – just as anyone in my position would face.
- ✓ But – in that process - I am also aware that some of you are acting in a very Godly, wise, therapeutic, and caring way. I could name names, but I won't.
- ✓ I just want to say I'm proud of you. A number of you in SBC are stepping it up and you're making a **positive difference**. You see the problems, and you don't ignore them.
- ✓ Instead, you confront them – you confront the people behind them – and you do this appropriately and with great maturity. It's awkward, and it's uncomfortable – trust me, I know. But it's what needs to be done.
- ✓ Put another way, those of you that are doing these things are doing what Paul is doing here. You are **implicating those who are causing the pain**. This is proper to do.
- ✓ And I am seeing good things come from that. Keep it up. God is always honored when we do the right thing, the right way, at the right time, with the right heart, and for the right reasons.
- ✓ (and that brings me to the third and final point of our outline)....

C. ISOLATE those who are doing what's wrong (this is a BIG issue for us to consider)

1. "You cannot run around with a skunk without smelling like one." If you don't want to stink, stop hanging around with those who do.
 - There comes a point in proper and Godly fellowship where we need to separate ourselves from those who have demonstrated they are not "*in Christ Jesus*."
 - That doesn't mean we don't care for them. It doesn't mean we don't love them, and it doesn't mean we stop praying for them.
 - But we need to stop associating with them. We need to stop trying to 'meet them where they are' while deluding ourselves into thinking we're doing the right thing.
 - Too often, these kinds of folks **want** to stay in the gutter; they **want** to remain in their selfish views, in their poor attitudes, and in their wrong choices.
 - You cannot help them or lift them out of the gutter. They don't want that kind of assistance. They would much rather you join them in the gutter where they are.
 - Misery loves company. Miserable people want others to be unhappy with them – just like 'wrong' people don't want to be proven wrong.

- Paul spends the first part of this passage we are studying today focusing on what the Thessalonian church is doing **right**.
 - They are suffering for *“the word of God which is at work in them” (Cf. vs. 13, earlier).*
 - They are imitators of God’s churches in **vs. 14**, and they are suffering for the right reasons in **that same verse**.
 - They are showing that they are indeed *“in Christ Jesus.”* Paul commends them for all these things that they are doing right.
- But now Paul shifts gears in **vss. 15 and 16**. Here, his tone gets darker and more direct.
 - He remains truthful, he remains caring, but he pulls no punches. He **isolates those who are doing what’s wrong**.
 - And Paul calls out several reasons for giving people space. In fact, Paul gives us four justifications for isolating others:

a. The first reason to isolate people is when they don’t want the truth (read vs. 15a again).

- These people killed Jesus. They silenced the prophets. They drove out Paul. They do not want the truth.
- The hard reality is there are many people in the church today who do not want the truth.
 - In **2 Tim. 4:3**, such people are noted to have three specific qualities. That passage reads:

“For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”

- **First**, these people do not want deep teaching and sound doctrine. They don’t want this because then they are accountable to it.
- Truth forces them to change something about themselves that they don’t want to change.
- So, they don’t want hard-hitting sound doctrine. They’ll claim it’s just someone’s opinion rather than recognize it’s God’s eternal truth.
- **Second**, these people want to *‘suit their own desires.’*
- They are not interested in what is best. They are not interested in what is necessary for them. Instead, they seek to fulfill their own desires.
- They want what they want. And they don’t want anyone to challenge that. If necessary, they’ll flip and flop and change their positions and statements as needed to eventually arrive where they want to be.
- Their personal ambitions are in opposition to what is most right and proper. They’ll do what it takes to satisfy their own desires.
- **And third**, they’ll pursue an alternative to sound and proper teaching.

- They will gather around them teachers of the sort they want - - or they will go to and listen to teachers that say what they want to hear.
- The key is they WANT this. It's what *'their itching ears WANT to hear.'* This is not an issue of NEED; it's an issue of WANT.

b. The second reason to isolate people is when they displease God and they are hostile to others (read vs. 15b).

- Really, these two qualities go together. If you are displeasing God, you will be hostile to others, and vice-versa. You cannot be one and not the other.
- We cannot always see these people 'displeasing God' because only God can see what's in the heart.
 - But we CAN see it when they are hostile to others. These are folks who are always upset at others, particularly when others are standing for the truth of God's Word – that's the larger context of this passage.
 - These are folks who are faultfinders and grumblers. These are folks who are constantly murmuring against good things that are happening, or they are taking issue with those who are doing what is right.
 - As **vs. 15** says, they are *'hostile to others,'* and this ties back to the previous point - - they are bellicose against the truth and against those who teach it.

c. The third reason we ought to isolate people is when they don't want the Gospel to be clearly and boldly proclaimed (read vs. 16a).

- This is a BIG reason to give these people space. Throughout **Ch. 2** here, we've seen Paul advance the importance of the Gospel. We've seen him applaud those who received the proclamation of the Gospel properly.
- But there are folks who don't want the Gospel message to be clearly and boldly delivered. They would rather criticize and silence those who proclaim it.
- Paul says in **vs. 16** that these kinds of folks would rather *"keep him from speaking so others might be saved."*
 - There is no way around the fact this is an alarming quality to have said about you. It's a profound insight into a very bad spiritual condition.
 - And it's not just true for individuals – it's also true for many churches. There are **many** churches who want to say they proclaim the Gospel, but they do not really do that.
 - They are far more obsessed with what they **don't** want to be rather than being passionate about what they **are** called to be.
 - We shouldn't be part of a church that refuses to teach the full counsel of God's Word and refuses to boldly and properly proclaim the Gospel.
 - Likewise, we need to **isolate** and give space to those who claim to be in Christ, but they are openly offended when the Gospel message is clearly proclaimed.

d. The last reason for isolating others is when they are unrepentant (read vs. 16b).

- Notice the ‘*heaping up*’ element here. This is key. Unrepentance – in the face of persistent and mounting sin is a dangerous indicator of spiritual depravity.
- There is a ‘holy ostracism’ here that we need to soberly weigh. **1 Cor. 5:11** says:

“But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.”

- There is something important here for us to remember. The church is called to be ‘holy’ and that means ‘set apart.’ We are not to be like the world that does not care about its sin.
- When someone in the body of Christ – “*claims to be a brother or sister*” – but shows choices, attitudes, a lifestyle, and standards which are not “*in Christ Jesus,*” and when they will not repent of those things, then God’s Word is clear.
- We should not associate with them. Or put in the words of our outline today, we should **isolate them**.
- Paul states at the end of **1 Thess. 2:16**, that God’s wrath “*has come upon them.*” We have nothing to gain – and we have everything to lose – if we choose to associate with those who refuse to repent of their wrongs.
- The point is we need to pick our friends carefully. Not everyone qualifies to be in our inner circle – and in fact the Bible is clear that some should not be.

Conclusion: When it comes to **suffering for the cause of Christ**, wisdom is needed. And with that wisdom, sometimes some tough choices need to be made. Today’s lesson has given us to meat to chew on, for sure.



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Solid Bread Community was started with a passion to teach the truth of God’s Word – every part of it, as it was divinely inspired to be understood.

The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don’t pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don’t teach what is NOT there. Don’t force a passage to mean something it really doesn’t.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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