

Protecting Relationships



SABBATH—JULY 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 17:5–9, 10–15, 16–34; 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:10.

MEMORY VERSE: “What is our hope? What is our joy? When our Lord Jesus returns, what is the crown we will delight in? Isn't [is not] it you? Yes, you are our glory [praise; what we take pride in] and our joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: True evangelism¹ leads to relationships that can stand the test of time and continue throughout life everlasting.

PAUL HELD A THREE-WEEK SERIES OF EVANGELISTIC² MEETINGS IN THESSALONICA. It was a very exciting series. But it stirred up trouble with local religious leaders and with a gang of troublemakers. Paul was finally thrown out of town by the city council. The members of the council also tried to prevent his return.

This lesson is about what happened after Paul tried to evangelize³ Thessalonica. It would have been easy for Paul to think about the bad things that happened to him in Thessalonica. But Paul's mind focused on the relationships that he developed with members of the new Christian community there.

Paul was heartbroken that he could not spend more time with the believers. He knew that the short time he had been with them might leave them discouraged. As Paul could not be there in person, he was inspired (caused) by the Holy Spirit to write letters to the believers instead. Those letters make up the books in the New Testament known as “Thessalonians.”

1. evangelism—the act of spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

2. evangelistic—spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

3. evangelize—to spread the good news about Jesus to the world.

SUNDAY—JULY 8**REBELLION (UPRISING) IN
THESSALONICA (Acts 17:5–9)**

Read Acts 17:5–9. According to these verses, why did the people of Thessalonica become angry with Paul’s message? What statements did Paul’s enemies make to get the city leaders interested in the case? What did those leaders do about the situation?

Suppose someone preaches new teachings and people get excited. The leaders and teachers of other religious groups may become jealous. As a result, they may do foolish things to try to stop the influence of the new teacher from spreading.

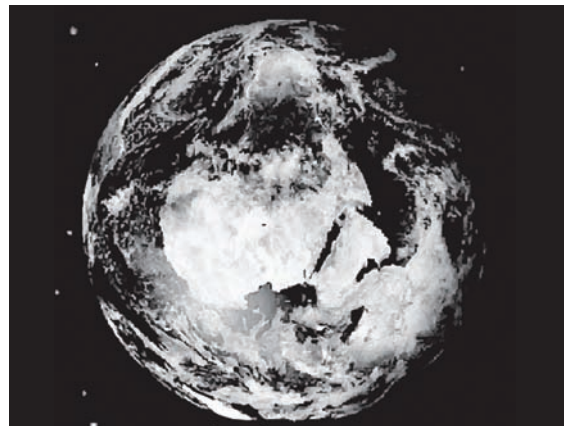
The Roman historian named Suetonius wrote about what happened just before the events occurred in Acts 17. He reported that trouble had developed among the Jews of Rome over a man named “Chrestus.” This word probably shows a Roman misunderstanding of the Jewish word for the Messiah or, in Greek, “the Christ.” Clearly, someone’s (Paul’s) preaching of the gospel had just split the Jewish people of Rome.

To Roman leaders, the Jews seemed to be arguing about putting a new king on the throne of Rome (read Acts 17:7). Maybe for that reason, the emperor ordered all Jews to be thrown out from his capital city (Acts 18:2). Some of these Jewish escapees (people who have escaped) settled in or passed through Thessalonica.

They also brought knowledge of these events to Thessalonica. So, the gospel had turned the world of Rome’s Jews upside down. And now, the religious leaders in Thessalonica decided to prevent the same thing from happening there.

Thessalonica itself was ruled by a city council of perhaps five or six “mayors.” They made decisions as a group. This means that they had some independence from Rome. And they would not want to give up this independence. So, the action of the city officials in this matter was quite interesting. They handled this problem rather wisely. (Read Acts 16:22–40 to learn what happened when leaders did not handle things so wisely.) They took some money from the new Christians as security so that they would not cause further trouble. Then the leaders let everyone go (Acts 17:9).

Jealousy can destroy us. What can we learn from the life and teachings of Jesus that can help us gain victory over jealousy?



The gospel turned the world of Rome’s Jews upside down.

MONDAY—JULY 9**THE EVENT IN BEREIA
(Acts 17:10–15)**

Attacks against people can be a two-way street. They are often started by serious lies about those who have done nothing wrong. But they also can come from improper actions (1 Peter 3:13–16; 1 Peter 4:12–16). Trouble in Thessalonica probably started by the jealousy of Paul’s enemies and also by the improper actions of the new believers. The two letters to the Thessalonians show that Paul had serious concerns about the improper actions of some in the church.

Paul encourages the Thessalonian Christians to live quiet lives and behave properly among their Gentile (non-Jewish) neighbors (1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12, NKJV). He warns them about their rough actions (1 Thessalonians 5:14, NKJV). Paul commands them to avoid those in the community who are troublemakers (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 7, NKJV). And Paul writes that some members of the church have become “busybodies”⁴ (2 Thessalonians 3:11). So, some members made trouble for both the church and wider society. This means that the attacks in Thessalonica were serious, but some new Christians were guilty too.

How was Paul’s experience in Berea different from the experience he had in Thessalonica? Read Acts 17:10–15. What is the message for us in that difference?

The Bereans were eager to know more about God and to better understand their Bibles. They listened openly, but they also tested everything they heard from the apostles (teachers and leaders) from the Old Testament.

This is an example for us. We can be open to new ideas. But we must always test these ideas with the teachings of the Bible. We have many things to learn and many to unlearn. At the same time, we must be careful to avoid false teachings, as they will lead us away from truth.

Troublemakers from Thessalonica learned that Paul and Silas had traveled to Berea and went there to cause trouble for them. But the Jews there did not close their minds to the new message. And “many of the Jews believed” (verse 12, NIV). Paul moved on to Athens, but Silas and Timothy remained in Berea in order to encourage and strengthen the new believers.



We can be open to new ideas. But we must always test them with the teachings of the Bible.

4. busybodies—people who keep themselves “busy” by causing trouble for others.

What are some examples of how the Christian church acted in ways that were wrong? What lessons can we learn from those mistakes? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.

TUESDAY—JULY 10

EVENT IN ATHENS (Acts 17:2, 3)

According to Acts 17:14–16, Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea while Paul went on to Athens. Paul instructed his traveling companions to have Silas and Timothy join him in Athens. But the Bible does not say whether or not they did so. In 1 Thessalonians 3:1, 2, we learn that Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica from Athens. So, Timothy, at least, seems to have joined Paul in Athens for a short time.

When speaking to Jews in Acts 17:2, 3, Paul begins with the theme of the Messiah (the Christ) in the Old Testament. When speaking to the pagan (idol-worshiping) philosophers (thinkers) of Athens (Acts 17:16–34), where does Paul begin? What can we learn from these different methods?

Paul does not just enter Athens, march up to the Areopagus (known also as Mars' Hill), and start talking to the philosophers there. Paul begins by spending some time walking around and forming his own opinions. He also gets in touch

with the Jews of Athens and some of the Greeks in the synagogue (Jewish house of worship) there. Paul does preach to them in his usual way (read Acts 17:2, 3). But he also would have been learning about the popular culture in the city. This is because the first step in any missionary effort is to listen and learn about the faith and world-views (ideas about the world) of the people you are trying to reach.

Paul also spent time in the marketplace of Athens near Mars' Hill. He would reason with anyone willing to talk with him. In this way Paul stirred up the curiosity of some Greek philosophers, who then invited him to speak to them on Mars' Hill.

Paul began his lecture to the philosophers of Athens by discussing their city and religions. His beginning point was Creation, a topic in which both he and they were interested. Paul did not argue his case from the Bible as he usually did in the synagogue. Instead, he argued from writings that the philosophers knew well (Acts 17:27, 28). But when Paul stepped into territory that went outside of their interest, the philosophers seemed to end the discussion. However, several persons continued to talk with Paul and became believers.

How well do we understand the worldly opinions and religious beliefs of those around us? Why is it important for us to have at least some knowledge of these things as we try to witness?



The first step in reaching people is to learn what they think and believe.

WEDNESDAY—JULY 11

ARRIVAL IN CORINTH (1 Corinthians 1:18–2:2)

Acts 18:1–18 shows two important events in the history of the world. First, the Jews were driven out of Rome during the rule of Claudius (Acts 18:2). Information from history books says that this event happened in A.D. 49. The other important event is the mention of Governor Gallio (Acts 18:12). Governors in Corinth were appointed for one-year terms, and information from history books show that Gallio's term of office took place during the year A.D. 50–51. Bible critics often doubt that the book of Acts is true. But this example and many others in Acts support the book's picture of history.

Timothy must have traveled from Thessalonica to Berea with Paul and Silas (Acts 17:10, 14, 15) after they left Thessalonica. Timothy then shortly joined Paul in Athens and

was sent from there to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:1, 2). There, Timothy joined up with Silas (Acts 18:5) and later journeyed to meet Paul in Corinth. First Thessalonians must have been written from Corinth shortly after Timothy's arrival. Paul knew what people were thinking in Achaia (in Greece), where Corinth was located (1 Thessalonians 1:7, 8). So, in 1 Thessalonians, Paul was acting on information brought to him by Timothy (1 Thessalonians 3:5, 6).

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:2. What is Paul's main point in these verses? What do we learn from these verses about Paul's missionary plans in Athens and Corinth?

Paul must not have been satisfied with the result of his talk with the philosophers of Athens. So, in Corinth Paul decides to use a bolder method in order to reach the Greek mind. But Paul does not drop the idea of meeting people where they are. This is because Paul clearly supports this method in the same letter (1 Corinthians 9:19–23). What he shows in Athens and Corinth is that the method of meeting people where they are is not a perfect method. It takes continuous learning and adjustment. Paul did not use the same method in every city. He was very sensitive to changing times, cultures, and events.

Read again the verses for today. How does the main message there speak to us today when the

“wisdom” of the world so often does not agree with the “foolishness” of the Cross?



Paul used different methods to reach different people where they were.

THURSDAY—JULY 12

PAUL SHOWS HIS HEART (1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:10)

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:10. What do these verses tell us about Paul’s emotional (full of feeling) connection with these believers? What can we learn from this connection about how we should connect with those to whom we minister (work)?

Paul’s deep thoughts sometimes make him appear to be unfeeling and cold to people (read, for example, Galatians 1:6, 7; Galatians 3:1–4; and Galatians 4:9–11). But 1 Thessalonians shows this to be untrue. Paul is a very emotional evangelist⁵ trying to obey Jesus’ gospel command to make disciples (Matthew 28:19, 20).

In the above verses, Paul shows his strong emotions. He misses the Thessalonian believers very much. When Jesus comes, Paul plans to present the Thessalonian believers to Jesus as examples of his work. Paul is not satisfied with just being saved at the end of time. He wants proof that his life has made a permanent difference for the kingdom of God.

Paul can no longer wait to hear about how the Thessalonians are doing. He decides to send a friend to learn how they are. Paul is afraid that somehow Satan might tempt (turn) them away from their beliefs. But he is comforted greatly when Timothy reports that they are standing strong in the faith.

There is an interesting hint in 1 Thessalonians 3:6. Paul is glad to hear Timothy’s report that the Thessalonians think well of him and that they want to see him as much as he wants to see them. Paul left Thessalonica so suddenly that he is unsure about what its people thought of him and his absence. The Thessalonians’ strong faith meant a lot to Paul. Paul was happy because he now felt that his mission was worthy and successful. He was, after all, only human.

Timothy’s report brings much joy to Paul, and he shows it in his prayers to God. But Paul’s joy does not drown out his great desire to see the Thessalonians face-to-face and to complete their education in the Christian walk. As Paul is unable to be with them in person, he first sends

5. evangelist—a preacher who travels from place to place, preaching the good news about Jesus.

a messenger, Timothy, and then writes letters to the Thessalonians. Those letters make up part of the New Testament in the Bible.

FRIDAY—JULY 13

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Suppose we would humble ourselves before God and be kind-hearted, courteous, and merciful. Then there would be one hundred conversions [changing one’s beliefs] to the truth where now there is only one. We may claim to be converted [believe in Christ], but we carry around with us a bundle of self that we perhaps hold too dear to let go. It is our honor to lay this burden at the feet of Christ. And in its place we need to accept and follow the character [who Jesus is] of Christ. The Savior is waiting for us to do this.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 9, pages 189, 190.

“During His ministry, Jesus continuously taught the disciples the fact that they were to be one with Him in His work of saving the world from the slavery of sin. . . . In all His work Jesus was training them for individual labor that would spread out all over the world.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 32.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Discuss your answer to Monday’s final question. How can we avoid making the same kind of mistakes? Or are we in some cases making them even now?

② In *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, page 189 (quoted earlier in Friday’s study), Ellen G. White names “self” or our sinfulness as a roadblock to winning more lost souls. In what ways does “self” show itself in our lives? How can we learn to die to self? What is the only true way that we can do that?

③ The central focus of the Great Command (Matthew 28:19, 20, NIV) is “make disciples.” Share some of your own experiences of being or making a disciple. How well is your church doing in making disciples? How can it become better at doing so?

④ How can you explain to someone the “foolishness” of the Cross? Why do you think Paul used these words? What should that tell us about how little we truly understand the importance of this truth, which is judged as “foolishness” by many?

SUMMARY: In three short weeks, Paul had become greatly bonded (connected) to the new believers in Thessalonica. As he could not go back to them, Paul sent Timothy. Under the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul also put his heart in two letters to these new believers. This story shows how meaningful evangelism must not depend only on acceptance of Christian beliefs. The whole life (physical, mental, and emotional [having strong feelings]) is involved in Christian faith.