

September 3, 2000 by Steve Brandon



Expressions of Thanksgiving (part 3)

1 Thessalonians 1:5e-7

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Paul expresses His Thankfulness in ...

1. How the gospel came to Thessalonica (verse 5).
2. How the Thessalonians responded (verses 6-10).

I recall a conversation that I had with a friend of ours when we were in California recently. We were talking about 1st Thessalonians, and he commented how much he has always been impressed with the pastoral nature of this epistle. Particularly, he was talking about Paul's tender care for the saints in Thessalonica (as exhibited in chapter 2). This indeed is an epistle that is filled with a great example of love and concern from the apostle Paul to those in Thessalonica. We have been looking at chapter 1, in which Paul is giving thanks to God for HIS work among the Thessalonians. The main thought comes in 1:2, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers."

His thanksgiving is described using 3 participles (i.e. the words ending in "I, N, G"). The first participle is found in verse 2 and tells the Thessalonians, "How" Paul expressed His Thankfulness (i.e. by praying - "making mention of you in our prayers"). The second participle is found in verse 3 and tells the Thessalonians, "When" Paul expressed His Thankfulness (i.e. always - "constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ"). The third participle is found in verse 4 and tells the Thessalonians, "Why" Paul expressed His Thankfulness (i.e. because he knew that God was at work in them - "knowing, brethren, beloved by God, His choice of you.").

Last week we saw that Paul's great thankfulness for the Thessalonians was all tied up in their election by God. He was primarily thankful that before the foundation of the world, God had chosen them for salvation. Or, in the words of Romans, "God made known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us" (Rom. 9:23). In verse 5, we have a detailed account of how the gospel came to the Thessalonians (and why Paul gave thanks to God).

1. How the gospel came to Thessalonica (verse 5).

1) It came in word.

When Paul said that the gospel came "in word," He wasn't talking about Paul's message, he was talking about God's message! This is what Paul will say in 2:13, "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God." Notice that when Paul said "our gospel" in 1:5. It isn't that this gospel originated from him. It was "his" gospel, because it was the gospel that he proclaimed. The origination of the gospel was God Himself. Three times in chapter 2, God calls it, "the gospel of God" (verses 2, 8, 9). When the gospel came in word, it was God's message that came to the Thessalonians.

2) It came in power.

When Paul said that the gospel came in "power," we said that this could have referred to miracles. "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:18-19). However, we don't have any record of such signs and wonders actually taking place.

Now the fact that the miraculous did occur is without question, for it most definitely did! You had people that God had so chosen for Himself, whom God took and brought to Himself. Though these people were idol worshipers, God, through the power of the gospel, turned their heart to worship "the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). As the gospel was proclaimed in Thessalonica, "it was the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16). Every time a sinner turns from his wicked ways, it is a miraculous event. Remember how Paul describes salvation: a dead man being made alive (Eph. 2:1-10). That is miraculous!

3) It came in Spirit.

When Paul said that the gospel came in "Spirit," he was referring to the conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment, which Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come and do (John 16:8). In this context, it is linked with the power is displayed as God turns a sinner from his crooked ways.

he was certainly linking this to you remember that often the power and the Spirit are linked in Scripture. 1 Cor. 2:4 - "My preaching and my message were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"

You remember that last time, I told you that the thing that really allowed me to understand this passage is to understand that revival broke out in Thessalonica when he was there!

Last week, I quoted from the effect of the ministry of Asahel Nettleton.

This week, I quote from the effect of the revival at Hartford, Connecticut in 1798-1800 - "The Lord seems to have stepped out of the usual path of ordinances, to effect this work more immediately in the displays of His Almighty power, and outpouring of his Spirit; probably to show that the work is his own." (Revival and revivalism, p. 128-9).

(Notice the use of power and Spirit in the same breath).

And understanding that fact has helped me to understand Paul's ministry in the New Testament. He was a preacher, whom God anointed to carry out his work.

When Paul preached, revival often broke out!

That's why when Paul went to these places in Pisidian Antioch and many are interested in the message that Paul proclaimed, it was nothing less than the sovereign working of the Spirit of God.

4. When Paul said that the gospel came in "full conviction" you remember that a better translation of this is probably "full assurance."

That is, when the gospel was preached, it was the Thessalonians who were fully persuaded that the message that Paul preached and proclaimed was true!

They received the message, not as the words of men, but for what it really is, the word of God! (2:13).

Additionally, Paul himself was fully persuaded of his message as well.

2:4 - "we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who examines our hearts."

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As a footnote here, let me briefly mention that many commentators like to say that verse 5 is only talking about Paul and that verses 6-10 are only talking about the Thessalonians. (I spoke with Jeff about this after the message 2 weeks ago).

Let me simply say that it seems difficult to speak about the power only through what Paul experienced.

It seems difficult to understand the role the Spirit played in the revival in Thessalonica, as merely effecting Paul.

Yes, Paul and Silas were "channels through which the blessing flowed," it seems that you need to take into account the effect of the Spirit's role on the Thessalonians!

Power was present, because of what it produced.

The Spirit was manifest because of what it produced.

So here, the full assurance may have been Paul, but most certainly it was the Thessalonians who were fully assured of the truth of the message, which led to their conviction and repentance - as we read in verse 9).

That is why I have outlined this passage as I have ...

:5 - how the gospel came

:6-10 - how the gospel was received.

:5 - when you describe how the gospel came, you describe the experience from the perspective of the preacher and the effect that it produced.

:6-10 - when you describe how the gospel was received, you describe the experience of the recipients in their response to the gospel.

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So, when the gospel came, it came ...

1. In word.

2. In power.

3. In the Holy Spirit.

4. With full assurance/conviction.

Now, in the bigger picture, we must remember that these characteristics are seeking to prove the point that God was at work during Paul's

time while he was among the Thessalonians.

And that is how Paul knows of God's choice of them - God willingly poured out His blessing upon the Thessalonians.

He said that when I came to you, what occurred could only be explained by the working of the Spirit of God upon your lives.

So also the 5th characteristic of how the gospel came to the Thessalonians.

It came

5. With example.

Patrick asked me this week, "so, where are you going to be in 1st Thessalonians?"

I said that we were going to start tonight in 1 Thess. 1:5e.

It is there that we read, ...

1:5 - "just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."

Notice first of all that Paul is appealing to their knowledge - what they know, for themselves - "as you know."

This isn't such an uncommon thing for Paul to do.

We will encounter this much in the next chapter

2:1. For YOU YOURSELVES KNOW brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,

2:2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, AS YOU KNOW, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

2:9 For YOU RECALL, brethren, our labor and hardship, [how] working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

2:10 YOU ARE WITNESSES, and [so is] God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;

2:11 just AS YOU KNOW how we [were] exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father [would] his own children,

In verse 5, Paul was simply reminding them of what happened.

He is saying, "listen, I am not making this up!"

You all know that this is most certainly true!

... And what is true is the example of how Paul lived while among them.

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Now, there is a subtle distinction in the wording here, which I think is interesting to continue to confirm our point.

When Paul says (as the NASB translates), "what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake," notice that there is a footnote, which says that this might be translated, "what kind of man we became among you for your sake."

This also is the same word that is found in verse 6 (in which most translations are the same) - "you also became imitators of us."

This also is the same word that is found in verse 7 - "you became an example to all."

And the subtle distinction is this.... This is a passive verb.

Now again, for those of you who are "English deprived," let me explain to you what a passive verb is.

The best way to understand this is to listen to the following sentences:

"The boy hit the girl."

"The boy was hit by the girl."

The first sentence is active.

The second sentence is passive.

So, in this case, the thrust isn't so much that they (in and of themselves) mustered up the ability to act this way.

No, the thrust is that were like this because it was God who was the divine enabler.

At any rate, Paul's point here is to tell them that during his stay in Thessalonica, he was supernaturally empowered to live blameless lives while among them.

Which again, subtly affirms our point - when the gospel came to the Thessalonians, these things were produced by God - and that gives confidence of God's working among them.

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So, you ask the question, how did they live?

I remember having a conversation with John Iversen about chapter 1. He said that you cannot understand chapter 1 without understanding chapter 2.

Which is exactly right!

Now, to the original readers, when Paul said, "YOU KNOW what kind of men we proved to be among you," it was easy for them to reflect

upon their experiences.

However, for us, it is a bit more difficult, because we don't have that experience.

But, what we do have is Paul's account of his time among the Thessalonians, which is told us in chapter 2, into which we will dig more deeply when we get there.

Notice first of all, in chapter 2, verse 7.

2:7 - "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children."

In other words, Paul's ministry was characterized by a tender care for the people, to be compared with how a mother cares for her children. -- We all know that. We all have seen the mother care tenderly for her children.

A mother has compassion and affection for her children, which is what the next verse speaks about ...

2:8 - "Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us...."

You will notice not only the affection for them, but also the total commitment of one's life for the people - "we were well-pleased to impart to you ... our own lives."

Verse 9 characterizes to what extent they gave of their own lives....

2:9 - "For you recall brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God."

Paul's labor among them was night and day, day and night.

The picture is one of a tireless laborer - the energizer battery, who keeps going and going and going and going....

But his life before them wasn't so much simply labor and labor and labor, but it was directed appropriately before them...

2:10 - "You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers."

In other words, they were living

holy, and

righteous, and

above-reproach lives while among them.

There was nothing that they did that brought shame or reproach to the gospel!

They not only had an affection for the people, but it was exhibited in a blameless life!

And their affection for the people was clearly demonstrated in their tireless labor and commitment of their entire lives for them.

And this, church family, is a picture of a pastor's life.

One who cares affectionately for the people (:7-8a)

One who labors diligently for the people (:8b-9)

One who models holy and righteous behavior before the people (:10).

And this is my challenge for those of you in Rockford.

As a pastor and shepherd of your souls, it is my calling to be affectionate toward you (:7-8a)

It is my calling to labor diligently while among you (:8b-9)

It is my calling to model holiness and righteousness before you (:10).

And, quite frankly, it is a frightening task.

I think of the task and it drives me to seek the sufficiency of the Spirit of God for the work that is and that lies ahead.

And not only this, but I need to be able to say to you, "AS YOU KNOW!"

You all need to be convinced that ...

- I have great affection for you (:7-8a)

- I labor diligently for you (:8b-9)

- My life models purity (:10)

And the day I fail in this, is the day that my ministry to you will fail in its effectiveness in your life.

The day that you are not convinced that I have an affection for you, is the day in which you question my motives for my ministry in your life.

The day you are not convinced that I am an incessant laborer for you, is the day in which you again will question my true desires for you.

The day you are not convinced that my life is one of purity, is the day in which you will doubt my ministry among you.

Please know that I will fail with these things.

It is at that point that you need to come to me and tell me. May God give me the grace to respond humbly and repentantly and thankfully to you.

But these are three foundation issues which must be true in the life of every pastor.

And it is these that give the pastor the credibility then to teach and instruct the people....

1 Thess. 1:11 - "Just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children."

See, it is the life of the pastor which gives him credibility to exhort and encourage.
And it is the affection of the pastor which allow the people to receive the instruction and act upon that instruction.

It is important for you to know of the life that a pastor or evangelist leads.

Al Martin once gave a principle that I think is very good:

"There is generally a direct relationship between the quality of life lived by the minister and the power and effectiveness of the truth coming through that life."

That is why Paul instructed Timothy (as we looked at about a year ago), "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these thing." (1 Tim. 4:16).

That is why Paul instructed the Ephesian elders, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock" (Acts 20:28).

That is, you need to live an upright life before the people and the people need to be convinced of it.

That is the life that Paul lived while among them.

It was clearly a life that was controlled and strengthened by the Spirit of God.

He had the affection of a mother....

- he was "gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." (2:7).

And he had the firmness of a father ...

- he was "exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children."

And the Thessalonians KNEW what sort of men they were.

They saw the power of God working in their life.

There was no getting around this.

Going back to 1 Thess. 1:5, we see that Paul was thankful to God because of ...

1. How the Gospel Came (:5)

2. How the Thessalonians Responded (:6-10)

Now, these two points are somewhat related.

This is because the Thessalonians responded to the gospel by imitating how Paul and Silas conducted themselves during their time in Thessalonica.

1 Thess. 1:6 - "You became imitators of us and of the Lord."

This word, "imitators," comes from the Greek word, *mimetai*, from which we get the word, "mimic."

And to mimic is simply to do what another is doing.

For instance, children, you know of the game "Simon says"?

In that game, you normally have somebody leading the group of people and saying and doing what he wants you to do.

And that is what is meant here by "imitate."

What another does, that is what you do.

We all know what this is like.

We recently got a computer game for our children, which is called "Blue's Clues," which is taken from a children's show.

On that show, there is a man named, "Steve" who tries to figure out these clues. He has a certain manner about him.

It has become a favorite pastime of ours at the dinner table to imitate this man "Steve" in the computer game.

(Imitate Steve - "a clue, a clue, a clue" - "where")

And that is what the Thessalonians did - they imitated Paul and Silas in their behavior!

This is what I love about this point.

Remember everything that I just told you about a pastor and his relationship to the flock?

Well, the same is equally true of the flock and their relationship to a pastor.

When Paul said that he had an affection for them (2:7-8a), they responded by having a similar affection for him (3:6 - "you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you."). Notice also their love for one another in chapter 4, verses 9 and 10.

4:9 - "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;

4:10 - for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia."

When Paul said that he gave his life for them and labored night and day for them (2:8b-9), they responded with a "work of faith and labor of

love" (1:3).

When Paul said that he behaved righteously and holy among them, they responded by "turning from idols to serve a living and true God" (1:9). Additionally, to some degree, they were pleasing God (4:1).

Let me say that this isn't merely an external mimicking, like a monkey - "monkey see monkey do."

When they became imitators, they became what Paul was and did what Paul did. See, there was an internal transformation that took place that the lives of the Thessalonians, that their whole persons were changed.

They were "new creations" doing what "new creations" do.

The KJV and NKJV get this meaning when really interpret this word, "imitate" by translating it, "and you became followers of us and of the Lord."

That is what happened. They followed Paul and Silas.

This past month, when we were in California, this was clearly demonstrated and Stanley-Ray followed after his Grandpa Ray.

When we saw Grandpa Ray walk by the window, there would be SR close behind.

When Grandpa Ray was pushing a wheelbarrow, there was SR pushing a little one right behind.

Notice this next phrase, "you became imitators of us and of the Lord."

There wasn't really two examples to follow, as if they followed Paul's example which was one thing and they also followed the Lord's example, which was another.

These examples were one and the same.

That is why Paul could say in 1 Cor. 4:16 - "I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me."

Later, in the same epistle, he qualified it correctly, 1 Cor. 11:1 - "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ."

To the Philippians, Paul said, "Join in following my example (sumimhtai), and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us."

Paul describes how they imitated him (back in 1:6), "having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit."

In other words, when they received the word, there was much tribulation.

It wasn't an easy thing for them to receive the word.

It was difficult.

There was much trouble in the reception of the word.

All one needs to do is pick up a book, like Foxe's book of Martyrs, and read of the tribulation that has come upon many of the saints of the past, who gave their lives for the gospel.

Polycarp

One such example is the story of Polycarp, who was placed before the proconsul and asked to "curse the Christ," upon which he would be released. Otherwise, he would be sentenced to death.

Polycarp simply responded, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?"

To this, the proconsul responded, "I have wild beasts; if you do not repent, I will throw you to them."

Polycarp said, "Send for them. For repentance from better to worse is not a changer permitted to us; but to change from cruelty to righteousness is a noble thing.

The proconsul again responded, "If you despise the wild beasts, I will make you to be consumed by fire, if you do not repent."

Polycarp, "You threaten me with the fire that burns for an hour and in a little while is quenched; for you know not of the fire of the judgment to come, and the fire of the eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why do you delay? Bring what you will."

He was burned at the stake.

Another example is that of ...

The lives of the Scottish Covenanters

This past month, I read a book loaned to me by Steve Belonger, called Fair Sunshine. It was a book about the Scottish Covenanters.

These were those who refused to take an Oath of Allegiance to the King of England, which acknowledge that the King was sovereign over all. For these covenanters knew that it was Christ alone who was king.

And many of them paid with their lives. That is what the book speaks about.

We know nothing of that today.

What sort of tribulation and hardship do we have when one professes Christ today?

Not much.

In fact, that is why I think that one of the biggest battle grounds in the church today is the battle over who is an authentic believer and who is not.

There are many professing Christians in our culture today, who, quite frankly, are not Christians.

But, the tribulation hasn't yet come upon them to see them fall away from the faith, which they profess!

I remember hearing about the Christians in Russia, before things recently crumbled there. They said that it was absolutely absurd that one

would "pretend to be a Christian in Russia." Because in Russia, to be a Christian is to lose all worldly advantages - education, promotion, and pay. Additionally they faced the ever dominating inspection of the KGB.
See, "When the times get tough, it's the true that get going."

And when the Thessalonians heard the truth, there was tough times to be had.
When we were in Acts 17, we looked at the difficult times they faced.
They faced the Jews, who stirred up the city to despise Paul and his teaching.
When Paul left town, the tribulation and distress kept coming.

Look at a very similar passage in chapter 2, verse 14 -

2:14 - "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same suffering at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews,
2:15 - "who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men."

Paul said that the tribulation that the Thessalonians received was to be equated with the tribulation that the churches in Judea received from the Jews.

The Jews rejected and killed their own Messiah!

(Simply read the gospel accounts and see how "he came into his own and those who were His own did not receive Him." - John 1:11).

The Jews killed their own prophets.

(Jesus even affirmed this in the parable of the vine-growers - Luke 20)

(also Jesus affirmed this in his woes to the Pharisees and Saducees - Matt. 23:31).

The Jews drove Paul out of town.

(Acts 9 records how "the Jews plotted together to do away with Paul" - Acts 9:23 - he escaped by being let down through an opening in the wall surrounding Jerusalem).

The tribulation and distress that the Thessalonians faced was real.

But look at how they faced the tribulations they endured...

1 Thess. 1:6 - "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit."

These believers received the difficult word with joy!

Now this can only be explained by the fact that God was working within them, which was a further confirmation of their election.

So, when Paul told them later to "Rejoice always" (5:16), they understood that this meant even in the most difficult of circumstances were they to "rejoice."

And they did.

And such was their behavior that it caused them to be an example to others.

1 Thess. 1:7 - "so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

Such was the effect of how they received the word that those in Thessalonica became the models to follow.

It says here that they became "an example."

This is one of the more picturesque words in all of the Bible.

The word in Greek, is tupos.

To the Greek, this word pictured a stamp, or impress.

It was the model of the thing to be followed.

Such was this church in Thessalonica - it was the model given for everyone to follow.

It was the pattern.

And this church became the pattern to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (Show Map).

The reason that this church was an example, is because the word went forth from Thessalonica

1 Thess. 1:8 - "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonian and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."

This is why the Bible sets up standards for the life that a deacon or an elder must meet (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1).

I met this past week with somebody at work last week and talked about our church.

The thing that will eventually give our church credibility will be in how this man sees my life.

If he sees in my life a life that hasn't been transformed by the power of God, I will have no credibility in his eyes.

This is sooooo true in ministry and in life as well.

I think especially of opportunities that I have had to disciple others.

I know that they will learn as much from my life as they will from the biblical content that I teach them (or have taught them).

How important it is that you live and model a consistent life before others.

Parents, this is especially true of you.

Your kids will remember your example far more than they will remember your words.

Alexander on Family Worship -

p. 33 - "Where the head of a family is lukewarm or worldly, he will send the chill through the whole house. ... Where the head of the family is a man of faith, of affection, and of zeal, consecrating all his works and life to Christ, it is very rare to find all his household otherwise-minded."

p. 38 - Family-worship has a direct and manifest tendency to make religion a matter of every-day interest."

1 Thess. 1:8-9 - Next week - Spurgeon - "Oceans of teaching."

en panti topoi - Ex. Dig., S 5 - Clearly hyperbole. "Paul is overstating the actual facts of the case in order to emphasize the extremely wide impact of their outreach." See also Col. 1:6; Rom. 1:8; Phil. 1:13; 2 Cor. 2:14.

as a result of the ministry of the Word the Thessalonian converts became exemplary believers, not only famous for their own consistency of life and testimony, but also for their missionary zeal in sending forth the word, which had wrought so blessedly in their own lives, to others.

To be biblically specific, God has given several defining passages explaining who a pastor is to be and what a pastor is to do, e.g. 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:6-9; 1 Pet 5:1-5. But perhaps the most explicit books in the NT regarding the work of the ministry are 1 and 2 Thessalonians. A careful analysis of these "pastoral" epistles leads to this basic "ministry description." A pastor's primary activities include:

And ye (KAI HUMEIS = and you on your part)

became followers of us, (Paul encouraged the believers to follow him in faith, as he had so closely matched his life to that of his Lord's - 1 Cor 4.16; 11.1; Gal 4.12; Eph 5.1; Phil 3.17; 4.9; 1 Thes 3.12; 2 Thes 3.7, 9)

and of the Lord, (We must imitate our Lord in holiness [1 Pet 1.15-16], love [Mat 5.43-48; Lu 6.36; Jo 13.34; 15.12], and suffering [Mat 16.24-25; Mark 10.38-39; Lu 14.27; Jo 15.18-20; 1 Pe 2.18-21])

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 9, 2000 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.