

I Thessalonians

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1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Vss. 1-2

- Things had never been easy in Thessalonica for Paul. Yes, there was tremendous success, but there was constant conflict and turmoil. Acts 17 tells us that as usual, Paul started in the synagogue, and as usual some became believers in Christ, and as usual this truly angered the Jewish leaders. These were angry in part because they had lost members and non-Jewish attenders, but also because they could not refute Paul. Out of frustration then, they sought to bring Paul before the civil magistrate on some trumped up charge. Not finding Paul, they grabbed his host, a man named Jason, and dragged him before the city authorities. The whole town was in an uproar. Paul even praises the Thessalonian Christians for how they with joy were saved despite the tribulation (1:6).
- So Paul reminds them here that they knew of all he had suffered previously in Philippi and that he knew there would be opposition in Thessalonica, so that his only prayer was that God would give him boldness to speak the gospel.
- But just because Paul left town didn't mean things quieted down. Indeed, it seems Paul's enemies only stepped up their attacks once he was gone. Here Paul is counter punching against his enemies and critics.

Vs. 3

- Here Paul responds to three charges that are easy for us to miss.
 1. Error/Delusion: Paul's critics were suggesting he was either totally wrong or if he actually believed what he was saying, then he was crazy. His enemies had two angles here: either from the Greek perspective about life after death with Christ or from the Jewish perspective about the son of a carpenter from Nazareth being the Messiah and Savior of the world.
 2. Impurity: The Greek word here is *akatharsia*. The word was often used in reference to sexual impurity. First, there were many traveling teachers who were unscrupulous. We saw in our study of John's letters that the Gnostics taught that when it came to food, or sex, or drinking that anything goes, because it was only the spirit that was important, not the body. Second, both the Jews and the Greeks had trouble with some of the language of the early church, such as in 5:26 where Paul asks that the church "Greet the brethren with the Holy Kiss". So it was easy to lob charges of impurity simply by making Paul out to be a Gnostic or by using the churches own language against it.

3. Deceit: Here the charge is that Paul is just in it for personal gain, either money or power or both. The idea is that Paul comes with a message of a glorious life after death and of freedom and forgiveness in this life and this is nothing more than selling some theological Brooklyn Bridge.

Vss. 4-8

- But Paul categorically denies all of these charges. He argues that it is God who has entrusted His message to Paul and that God is the only One who he seeks to please. Paul as he preaches only has an audience of One.
- He reminds them that when they arrived in Thessalonica they did not come trying to flatter anyone nor they come asking for money or even suggesting the idea. So that the message was not given to them trying to schmooze them or get money out of them in any way.
- Perhaps the earliest publication of the church was a little book known as “The Didache, the Teachings of the Twelve Apostles.” Dating to the first century, in it were the basic teachings of the faith and some practical points for the young church to follow, including how to treat traveling preachers. If the traveling preacher asked to stay for a day or two and never asked for money, then they were to be treated as genuine. But if they asked to stay a third day and asked for money then they were to be treated as false prophets and turned out. Even in the first century the church was aware of people using the goodness of the church for ill-gotten gain and immoral purposes.
- Nor did they try to elevate themselves. Paul could have said, “I have had a conversation with the Risen Christ and He selected ME to be His missionary to you! And Christ has given me great powers to perform mighty miracles. Now get down on your knees and be grateful I am here.” But Paul never did that. It was never about him. He was just the messenger. It was all about the message and the One who gave it.
- Paul does not say, “I came to you”, only that “Our message came to you”.
- It further seems that Paul was being accused of being something of a dictator. He counters this by saying that he came to the Thessalonians like a new mother loves and cares for her baby. Yes, any good mother comes with a measure of discipline for her children, but more so with great affection and tenderness. Paul tells them that he poured love into them, poured the Gospel of God into them, indeed, he says we poured our very lives into you.