

7. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-20

In chapter one, Paul described the church at Thessalonica as imitators of him in 1 Thess 1:6-8:

6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere.

The fact that others followed their example led Paul to say, “The Lord’s message rang out!” The church’s influence is felt throughout the churches even today, by this scripture and by the hymn it inspired: *Ring It Out*. The text of that song resounds in our assembles to this day:

There's a message true and glad
For the sinful and the sad, Ring it out, ring it out;
It will give them courage new,
It will help them to be true; Ring it out, ring it out.
Tell the world of saving grace,
Make it known in ev'ry place, Ring it out, ring it out;
Help the needy ones to know
Him from whom all blessings flow;
Ring it out, ring it out.

Paul’s Character and Characteristics as a Preacher

1 Thess 2:1-6

2 You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. 2 We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. 6 We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

As Paul describes his experience with the church, he offers, imbedded in the discussion, an explanation of just what a preacher says and does. In spite of the fact that he was driven out of town, his work was not a failure.

He told the gospel in spite of strong opposition.
He did not teach error, have impure motives, nor try to trick them.
He spoke as one approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel.
He did not try to please men but God.
He did not use flattery.
He was not into it for greed.
He was not looking for praise from men.

Paul Not a Burden to Anyone

1 Thess 2:6b-9

As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 9 Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

Paul often spoke of his rights as an apostle which he sometimes chose not to exercise. In 1 Cor 9:3-6, he described those rights:

3 This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. 4 Don't we have the right to food and drink? 5 Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? 6 Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?

On the other hand, he often worked, sometimes making tents, his trade, that the local church be not burdened. Such was the case at Corinth in Acts 18:1-4:

18 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, 3 and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

Paul never wanted to be a burden to anyone while he preached.

1 Thess 2:10-12

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

On the one hand Paul and his companions were holy, righteous, blameless, responding to the church as a father responds to his children—encouraging, comforting, and urging. On the other hand, with lives worthy of God, they were called into his kingdom and glory.

They Received the Word of God as It Actually Is the Word of God

1 Thess 2:13-15

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. 14 For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men 16 in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

This passage is a wonderful proof text to establish the unity of the gospel and the oneness of the gospel whenever and wherever it is preached. There are those who believe that the Christian Jews circulated the gospel stories about Christ toward the end of first century. Yet, Paul in the passage written about 47 AD established the oneness of the gospel for all time:

They received the word of God as it was in truth the Word of God.

They imitated the churches of Judea who practiced this very same gospel

Both the church in Thessalonica and the churches in Judea suffer persecution.
The gospel they both preached is the gospel that saves.

Jude stated the certitude of the gospel for all times in Jude 3: Jude 3-4

3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

Paul's Hope and Joy and Glory When the Lord Jesus Comes

1 Thess 2:17-20

17 But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. 18 For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, did, again and again – but Satan stopped us. 19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

Paul had wanted to come to Thessalonica time and again; but Satan stopped. Satan, the devil, continuously impedes our work. Perhaps, we are too casual in considering his influence. His power and deceit is all about us. Luke 22:3-6 shows how he entered Judas:

3 Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. 4 And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. 5 They were delighted and agreed to give him money.

Satan also entered into the heart of Ananias in Acts 5:3-4:

3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?

Jesus spoke of Paul's work turning people from the power of Satan in Acts 26:17-18:

7 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Paul's hope and joy result from this deliverance of the Thessalonians from Satan and the presence of these Christians, converted and nurtured by Paul, at the coming of the Lord.