

# SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SIN

## PART 58

### REWARDS & INHERITANCE, PART 10

The crown of joy or rejoicing or exultation.

This crown is connected with preaching the gospel and seeing people come to saving faith in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 2:19–20 <sup>19</sup>For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? <sup>20</sup>For you are our glory and joy.

Philippians 4:1 <sup>1</sup>Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

The work of evangelism is an activity that earns a reward from the Righteous Judge. Evangelism is not simply the work of a person who calls himself, or herself, an evangelist and conducts services and crusades. Evangelism is the work of all those who are disciples of Christ Jesus. A lot of evangelism work is done by parents with their children. A lot of evangelism work is accomplished through Christian people speaking to friends and co-workers. A lot of evangelism work is done by local pastors in the course of their work as they shepherd a local flock of believers and interact with their community. A lot of the work of evangelism is done by you and by me and that is how it is supposed to be done. It is the job of the leaders of the local body to train that body to do the work of evangelism. This is not a job the body is to abdicate to the leadership. Further, it is not the body's job to abdicate the work of evangelism solely to the "professionals" such as Billy Graham. They have their place, but individual Christians are not to leave to them alone. It is the body's job to do the work of evangelism and doing that work will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ. The vast majority of Christians will never be commended for being a martyr, but every Christian has the opportunity to witness to other people about Christ Jesus and His work on the cross on their behalf.

"Some Christians assume that the work of telling the good news about Jesus to people that don't know Him is assigned either to the person who is a gifted evangelist or to the church's staff ministers. On the contrary, Paul specifically taught that the evangelists and the pastors and teachers were not given to the church to be the only ones who do the work of the ministry. Rather, those gifted persons...were given primarily to equip (train) the individual believer (saint) so that he or she could do the work of ministry that builds the church..." [Joe L. Wall, *Going for the God*, p. 186]. The Lord commissioned his

original group of disciples to do that work and through them that assignment was passed on to the succeeding generations of believers.

Acts 1:8 <sup>8</sup>but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

John 17:20 <sup>20</sup>"I am not praying only on their behalf, but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their testimony,

Ephesians 4:11–12 <sup>11</sup>And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

Paul told the Thessalonians that he would be able to point to them as fruit resulting from His service to the Lord produced through his evangelistic efforts. It seems to be important to point out that we are not responsible for the conversion of people; that is God's job. Our job is to be faithful to accurately present the gospel of grace and whether anyone ever believes it or not is out of our control. Preaching the gospel, in and of itself, will be rewarded because that glorifies the Lord who made the gospel possible in the first place. We are not lone rangers in this process. God has a drawing ministry that is operating in the world (John 6:44) and that ministry places people in our presence to hear the gospel. That ministry also works on the heart of unbelieving people as they hear the gospel. Christ through His work on the cross is drawing people to Himself (John 12:32) because fallen people intuitively know their need, whether they admit it or not and they know God whether they admit that or not. As people hear the gospel message, the Holy Spirit is convicting them of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). But in conjunction with this, we know that people have to hear an accurate, and I stress accurate, presentation of the gospel of grace and that is our job. By accurate, I'm referring to a gospel of pure grace apart from any suggestion that people have to do anything other than believe.

Romans 1:18–21 <sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup>because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Romans 10:17 <sup>17</sup>So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Constable recognized the association between Paul's reward and his converts, his "fruit," from Thessalonica. "Those friends fill their hearts with hope and joy and exultation—hope that the divine work so well begun in them will increase to maturity, joy in the evident genuineness of their faith, exultation as they look forward to pointing to such converts as the fruit of their service before the tribunal of Christ. But nothing can disguise the pride and delight which they take in their converts themselves, who have become so dear to them (v 8). As parents rejoice in their children and cherish high hopes for them, so is it with the writers and their converts. Elsewhere Paul speaks of his converts as the 'fruit' of his service (Rom 1:13), the 'seal of his apostleship' (1 Cor 9:2) and, in words which echo what is said here, his 'joy and crown' (Phil 4:1).

The 'crown of exultation' alludes to the wreath which was awarded to the victor in an athletic contest: victory in such a contest afforded the victor and all associated with him ample ground for καύχισις ('boasting' [exultation, NASB]). Paul repeatedly portrays the Christian life, and in particular his apostolic ministry, in athletic terms: in earthly races, he says, the contenders run 'to receive a perishable wreath (στέρφανος), but we an imperishable' (1 Cor 9:25). Here and now his converts are his prize, the token that he has not 'run in vain' (Gal 2:2); but he looks forward to the occasion of final review and reward, when he will present his converts to the Lord who commissioned him, as evidence of the manner in which he has discharged his commission" [Thomas L. Constable, "1 Thessalonians" in *Constable's Notes on the Bible*].

Many other commentators have recognized the reward aspect of Paul's work in evangelism with the Thessalonian and Philippian believers. By application, we know this recognition will cover all of Paul's work and not just in those two cities and it will recognize the work performed in evangelism by all believers throughout this dispensation. The Thessalonians will be "the basis for his [Paul's] expectation of reward—his crown (a victor's wreath). All of this will be fully realized in the presence of the Lord Jesus at the time of His coming when believers will be reunited and rewards distributed" [Kevin D. Zuber, "1 Thessalonians" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, p. 1883]. "The metaphor that Paul uses, therefore, is powerful: just as a winning athlete boasts of his victory wreath, so the apostle will boast of the Thessalonian congregation, who are his victory wreath....it is at the coming of Christ that the believers in Thessalonica will be the evidence or proof that Paul has faithfully fulfilled his apostolic calling...the *kauchesis* of which Paul speaks here is not false boasting or vain pride in his own accomplishments but a vindicating note of exultation for the work in Thessalonica that God brought about through him" [Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1-2 Thessalonians*, p. 203]. The important thing for us to understand is that God is no respecter of persons; the reward Paul will get for his evangelism efforts is the same reward all believers have the opportunity to be awarded.

"So it will be that, when we stand in the presence of Jesus at His royal coming, our hearts will overflow with pride, joy, and exultation because of those who stand with us at that time—those we have had a share in bringing to the Savior....For all eternity we will have 'walking wreath-crowns' living and enjoying with us the glorious presence and

unspeakable delights of life in the Kingdom of the Prince of Peace" [Joe L. Wall, *Going for the God*, p.184-185].

Before Paul wrote about the crown of joy in 1 Thessalonians 2:19 concerning his reward for evangelizing the Thessalonians, he described the characteristics of his evangelistic work. In so doing, he left us an evangelization blueprint.

1 Thessalonians 2:1 <sup>1</sup>For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain [κενός].

Vain, κενός, pertains to lacking in results; fruitlessness. We know that Paul experienced persecution in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9) amid "much tribulation" (1 Thess. 1:6), yet he had success there, but we also know that only a few people out of the entire population of the city came to faith. "...his boldness, and that of his companions, was impressive in light of the harsh treatment they received in Philippi prior to coming to Thessalonica....The coming of Paul and his companions was not in vain because the Thessalonians had become followers of Christ. Then he noted the conditions of his ministry. Paul and his companions began the work in Thessalonica after persecution. They had been forced out of Philippi [and they would be forced out of Thessalonica as well, Acts 17:10] where they had been beaten (suffered) and imprisoned (mistreated). Still they were bold, even though they continued to face opposition. Paul was reminding the Thessalonians that his was no self-serving, ease-seeking ministry. It is impressive to consider that Paul and Silas probably still had the scabs and sores on their backs from their beating in Philippi (Ac 16:22-23) when they walked into Philippi [sic; I'm sure this was meant to say Thessalonica] and nevertheless began to proclaim the good news again" [Kevin D. Zuber, "1 Thessalonians" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, p. 1880-1881].

The blueprint, or application, for us in this verse is threefold. One, preach the gospel even in the midst of persecution. Two, understand that only a small number of people will respond to the good news; therefore, do not get discouraged. Remember, our responsibility is to preach the good news; God does the converting. Third, rejoice in bringing those few people to the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 2:2 <sup>2</sup>but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness [παρρησιάζομαι] in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

Paul is reiterating the powerful nature of the opposition he faced in Philippi but he continued to preach the gospel in Thessalonica even in the midst of much opposition there as well. Boldness, παρρησιάζομαι, means to speak boldly and to fearlessly preach the message; it refers to speaking openly, boldly, and without constraint.

The blueprint for us here is to continue to preach the gospel even in the face of persecution. We may have to be smart and crafty concerning how we accomplish that mission, but danger in doing it is not in and of itself to prevent the message from being proclaimed by us at all. In early Greek, the word "may have orig[inally] denoted a

sense of freedom to say whatever one wished....Since in practice freedom of speech encounters opp[osition] from time to time *παρρησί*□ acquired the further meaning of 'fearlessness, boldness...' [New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis, s.v. "παρρησί□"]. In this day and time, we, Christians, are seeing our freedom of speech and freedom of religion being seriously eroded. I suspect that boldness in ever increasing measure is going to be required of us to preach the gospel to people. We will have to be bold because so few people want to hear the good news, we will have to be bold because we will face opposition for preaching the good news, and we will have to be bold because we may well face persecution and personal hardship for preaching the good news. Paul set the example in that we are not to shy away from that responsibility in the face of opposition.

1 Thessalonians 2:3–4 <sup>3</sup>For our exhortation does not come from error [*πλάνη*] or impurity [*ἀκαθαρσία*] or by way of deceit [*δόλος*]; <sup>4</sup>but just as we have been approved [*δοκιμάζω*] by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines [*δοκιμάζω*] our hearts.

The blueprint Paul provided us here concerns our sanctification salvation. Our lives are to be lived glorifying God and part of the way we do that is by serving Him with pure motives.

Error, *πλάνη*, used figuratively means deception or delusion; it is the content of that which misleads or deceives. Paul isn't referring to making a mistake here; he is saying that the content of his message was truth and therefore not misleading or deceptive in any way. He was presenting an accurate gospel message. That is so vitally important today; so many people hear and believe a false gospel of faith plus works.

Impurity, *ἀκαθαρσία*, refers to immorality or impurity. Paul had no impure ulterior motives such as getting rich off these people or taking advantage of the women he encountered or by seeking personal power, fame, and glory. When you think of men teaching people religious dogma with impure motives think David Koresh and Jim Jones and Brigham Young concerning women and think all the word of faith teachers today who are fleecing people with their lying prosperity gospel. Paul had no such impure motives and we mustn't harbor those things in our hearts either.

Deceit, *δόλος*, means to deceive by using trickery and falsehood. The first use of the word in ancient Greek referred to trapping something particularly with the idea of fish bait [New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis, s.v. "δολίω"]. People must not be deceived into believing in Christ Jesus. People can be deceived by believing a false gospel and we see many people all around us today who believe many false gospels but particularly some form of faith plus works. Believing a lie, any lie, concerning the gospel of grace cannot lead to eternal life; there is only one gospel of grace and only through believing the good news that is presented in that gospel can anyone be justified and granted eternal life. There was no eternal benefit to Paul or nor is there any eternal benefit to anyone else through the preaching of a false gospel; Paul's goal was to see people come to faith in Christ Jesus. Preaching a deceitful, false gospel to people cannot be commendable in the eyes of the Lord who

died to save mankind. We have to be careful to preach a true gospel of grace; Paul was faithful to preach the only good news that could save people. As Paul noted, God, who knows the heart, would know whether or not he was preaching the gospel in good faith and Paul wasn't about to let the Lord down by means of any sort of unfaithfulness.

"Approved" and "examines" are both translations of δοκιμάζω which means examined, tested, or judged as good, genuine, and worthy. Paul had been tested by God and found to be a trustworthy servant.

The truth is, we are all being tested and we all will be tested. As Paul wrote here, God knows our hearts.

Hebrews 4:12 <sup>12</sup>For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The Lord will test our works at the judgment seat of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:13 <sup>13</sup>each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

In order to follow the conduct of Paul in his evangelistic efforts, we need to be free from error in our presentation of the gospel. Each person will preach the gospel in different ways but the basic elements of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone must be included. We need to have a genuine desire to see people come to Christ so their sins are forgiven and they are granted eternal life. We are not to be preaching the gospel because we think there is some personal, temporal gain to be had. There certainly is no benefit to anyone for trying to trick people into saying they believe in Jesus. Obviously, there might be some temporal benefit of wealth or fame, but those things will be turned into eternal loss rendering the temporal satisfaction moot. If you watch the word of faith preachers for only a few minutes, you will notice a great deal of psychological manipulation going on in order to get people to say they believe in Jesus with the ultimate goal of relieving those people of their money. This is deceit. We need to pray that when God examines us we will be judged good, genuine, and worthy. We need to pray that our work will be judged as gold, silver, and precious jewels. When that happens, the crown of joy for preaching the gospel is a possibility.

How do we do this? We know and obey the Word of God. When we teach and preach sound doctrine in accordance with the Word of God, we are operating in the same manner in which Paul was operating in Thessalonica. We keep on the narrow path by knowing and adhering to the Word of God.

1 Peter 2:2 <sup>2</sup>like newborn babies, long for the pure [ἄδολος] milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

Peter is referring to sanctification salvation and he is telling us that we grow through knowing the pure, unadulterated Word of God and growth can only be worthwhile when it is in accord with sound doctrine. What we do to serve the Lord is affected by what we know. The application we get from Paul in these verses is evangelism starts with knowing the Word of God so that we are presenting the truth to people without error, with pure hearts dedicated to serving the Lord and not for our own personal benefit, and with a love for the lost people that genuinely desires to see people saved.

All of this is based on the foundation of Paul's desire to serve and please God rather than serving and pleasing men by catering to their worldly and sinful thinking. It seems we all have an innate desire to please other people or to receive recognition from them. To an extent, that is a good thing. We need to love each other and coexist with one another. In the spiritual realm, however, God is the only One we need to please. When we are doing things to please Him, our behavior should be pleasing to other people as well. Ultimately, the Lord is the only one who will evaluate the life we have lived and that life should be lived in and for Him. In terms of preaching the gospel, the message will be offensive to many people but that cannot stop us from preaching it because doing the work of preaching the good news is pleasing to God.

1 Thessalonians 2:5–6 <sup>5</sup>For we never came with flattering [κολακεία] speech, as you know, nor with a pretext [πρόφασις] for greed [πλεονεξία]—God is witness— <sup>6</sup>nor did we seek glory [δόξα] from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

Paul continued describing his ethical life as an evangelist and in so doing he continued to provide us with the example that we should follow.

Paul didn't come preaching words that flattered people's egos. Flattering, *κολακεία*, means flattering talk; it is to praise as a means of gratifying someone's vanity. The purpose of flattery is to win favor with a person or to influence them to accepting one's position or even to gain power or control over them. People have to make a real decision for Christ and charming them into it doesn't fit that mission. It isn't our desire to have power over people; it is our desire to help people recognize the God who controls His creation including the subject of our evangelistic message. It isn't the job of the evangelist to tell people how good they are; it is the job of the evangelist to point out their sin and their need for a Savior. Most people would not consider that to be a flattering type of message. People get angry when they are confronted with the idea of sin. Most people think they are "good people," or at least "good enough people" and that deceptive self-evaluation convinces them they should be acceptable to God. That makes it all the more imperative they hear the truth; that's what Paul did and that's what we are to do. So-called "Christian television" is full of such flatterers posing

as evangelists. They flatter people's egos by telling them that Christ and Christianity are all about them and their good life now which is a cover for fleecing them of their money.

Paul then addressed the issue of greed. Paul was not using the gospel as a pretext for greed. Pretext, *πρόφασις*, means an outward show or appearance, a pretense or pretext put forth in order to cover one's real intent, that which is put forth as a cause or reason. This very situation is all around us today. The gospel has been perverted and used as a pretext for gaining wealth. Greed, *πλεονεξία*, means greediness; it is a strong desire to acquire more and more material possessions or to possess more things than other people have, all irrespective of need. Paul didn't use Christ and the gospel of grace as a pretext for gaining wealth as do the prosperity preachers that are so popular in American culture today. We can't be very sincere about bringing people to Christ if our main concern is acquiring wealth—their wealth—for ourselves. People with impure thoughts and deeds, utilizing deceit and flattery preach a false gospel of self by preying on people's own desire for material things and that is how the good news is perverted. It isn't just wealth that drives some people to preach a false gospel; fame and power can also be powerful motivating factors. We must never discount the fact that wolves in sheep's clothing will enter the body and try to tear it apart. Paul didn't do any of these things and what he did do he did with a heart that was pure in motive—and the God who searches the heart knows that to be true. Paul is modeling for us the attitudes, the actions, and the motives that we are to have when preaching the good news so that when God examines our motives for preaching the gospel to people we too will be found faithful.

Jeremiah 17:10 <sup>10</sup>“I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.

Both the Lord and Paul addressed the idea of temporal profit as compared to true eternal wealth. This is an important doctrine; greed is not a Christian virtue.

Matthew 16:26 <sup>26</sup>“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Contrary to what most theologians believe, this verse is not referring to justification salvation but to sanctification salvation; the Lord was addressing discipleship issues which lead to eternal rewards. That's what Paul was addressing in his blueprint for evangelism. “...salvation of the soul refers to deliverance from a wasted life to a life of heightened satisfaction, enjoyment, usefulness, victory, status, authority, and rest in the coming millennial kingdom....The words ‘profited, gain, save, loses, and exchanges’ reflect the language of business risk and reward. An investment in Christ's unpopular



enterprise will pay far richer dividends in the future than that of the world in the present” [Hal M. Haller, “Matthew” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, pp. 76-77].

1 Timothy 4:8 <sup>8</sup>for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

1 Corinthians 10:33 <sup>33</sup>just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.

Paul was not into preaching the gospel in order to make himself well known. He didn't need the acclaim of human beings; his only desire was to gain the approval of God. When the word “glory” is used in connection to human beings, it is different than when it is used in connection with God. True glory can only be attached to God. “Etymologically, the word primarily means thought or opinion, especially favorable human opinion [which is what Paul was referring to], and thus in a secondary sense reputation, praise, honor (true and false), splendor, light, perfection, rewards (temporal and eternal). Thus the *doxa* of man is human opinion and is shifty, uncertain, often based on error, and its pursuit for its own safety is unworthy. But there is a glory of God which must be absolutely true and changeless. God's opinion marks the true value of things as they appear to the eternal mind, and God's favorable opinion is true glory.... Glory, therefore, is the true apprehension of God or things...” [Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, s.v. “δόξα”]. Paul wasn't searching for the faulty glory of man; he was only interested in glorifying God through his service to Him.

1 Thessalonians 2:7–8 <sup>7</sup>But we proved to be gentle [νήπιος, little children] among you, as a nursing mother [τροφός] tenderly cares for her own children. <sup>8</sup>Having so fond an 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 very dear to us.

There are some grammatical and interpretive issues in 1 Thessalonians 2:6-8. It may be that the last part of v. 6 should be in the sentence with v.7 reading, “even though as apostles of Christ we might have exerted our authority but we proved to be little children among you.” The word translated “gentle” is actually the word for small child, infant, or baby. The word for gently is not νήπιος, it is ἥπιος meaning placid, gentle, mild, easy, or compliant. The translators of the NET Bible believe νήπιοι (the word is plural, little children) to be the correct translation. Therefore, connecting their conduct as little children with the fact they were apostles of Christ and could have exercised their authority as such but didn't is probably correct. They were humble and suppressing their rights in order to serve the people of Thessalonica. Their attitude going in was one of children who are submissive to others.

Another interpretive issue is that the word translated “nursing mother” is τροφός which means a wet nurse; a person who functions as a substitute for a mother in the process of rearing children. “The word translated ‘mother’ (*trophos*) literally refers to a woman who is nursing a child. It may be translated ‘wet nurse’ rather than ‘mother,’ but most likely Paul chose the term to convey tenderness, not to distinguish between a mother and a nurse. The children are also identified as her ‘own’ (*heautēs*) children (not her ‘little’ children). Thus the image is that of a nursing mother caring for her own infant. The fact that this woman is nursing her own children rather than acting as a hired wet nurse implies a parental bond that goes beyond mere gentleness and bridges well to the assertions of love in the following verse” [Michael Martin, *New American Commentary: 1, 2 Thessalonians*, pp. 79-80]. It looks like there is a subtle contrast between the concepts of a wet nurse who is caring for her own children with great affection as opposed to a wet nurse who is caring for the children of another woman presumably without the same amount of affection.

Neither of these interpretive challenges changes the point that Paul is making which is the Christian responsibility to love people at least to the extent of sharing the gospel with them. It also doesn't change the point that he is providing us with a blueprint for personal evangelism. Loving people is part of that blueprint. You can't paint a better, more powerful picture of love than a mother caring for her babies.

Beyond evangelism, Paul had a genuine, personal love for these people. He not only cared for them as fellow human beings who were lost and needed to hear the good news, but as he got to know them he liked them as individual people. I'm not suggesting we have to personally like each person with whom we come in contact; I am suggesting we care enough about other people as fellow human beings to share God's genuine love for them in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:9 <sup>9</sup>For you recall, brothers and sisters, our toil and drudgery: By working night and day so as not to impose a burden [ἐπιβαρέω] on any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

Burden, ἐπιβαρέω, means to excessively weigh down which leads to the idea of being a financial burden. Paul apparently worked very hard at supporting himself so he would not be any sort of burden to the people he was evangelizing. We have that sort of situation with us today in the form of what we call bi-vocational pastors. These are men who pastor among a group of people who are unable to support them full-time so they work at a job supporting themselves and their families while ministering to the church they lead.