

The Measure of a Ministry

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

- I. The measurement of _____ (3a)
 - A. God's _____ (Rm 10:17; 1 Pet 2:2; Ps 1; 119:105)
 - B. Our _____ (Col 2:6; Job 23:10; 1 Pet 1:6-7)
- II. The measurement of _____ (3b)
 - A. The new _____ of love (Jn 13:34-35)

Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, male and female, Jew and Greek, learned and ignorant . . . sat down at one table, and felt themselves all one in Christ Jesus. They were ready to break all other bonds, and to yield to the uniting forces that streamed out from his Cross. There never had been anything like it. No wonder that the world began to babble about sorcery, and conspiracies, and complicity in unnamable vices. It was only that the disciples were obeying the new commandment, and a new thing had come into the world - a community held together by love and not by geographical accidents or linguistic affinities, or the iron fetters of the conqueror . . . The new commandment made a new thing, and the world wondered. - Alexander Maclaren
 - B. The new _____ of love (Jn 13:34-35)
- III. The measurement of _____ (4-5)

The Gentile believers in Thessalonica share Abraham's faith, expressed in the rhetorical question: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25). Still, they are being unfairly pounded with trials, while their persecutors live free of trouble. This tension has always caused the believer anguish, who looks on a world where might makes right. The psalmists of old faced the same problem. On the one hand they affirmed: "May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth" (Ps 67:4). But at the same time they pondered: "How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? ... How long will my enemy triumph over me?" (Ps 13:1-2).

The Thessalonians too lived daily with the sharp "cognitive dissonance" of belief in a just God and seeing with their own eyes that the world is unfair. The apostle knows that good eschatology has a way of holding both those truths in proper alignment. Before God, there is a fundamental distinction between those moving toward the kingdom and those who will be taken by surprise by the final judgment. The Thessalonians need not avenge themselves but can do good to "all people" (1 Thess 5:15), nor need they ever doubt God's justice.

- Gary S. Shogren

A Christian is made worthy by God's grace, which he receives as a free gift by faith in Jesus Christ. His trials simply expose what is there already and since the character that emerges through the fire of testing is God-given, God receives all the glory. The grace of God that makes it possible for a Christian to withstand the fires of human experience, which destroy non-Christians, is a Christian's only claim to being worthy of God's kingdom.

- Thomas L. Constable