



1 Thessalonians

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For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

1 Thessalonians 2:1

The word "For" here is referring back to verses 1:5 and 1:9. In both of those verses, Paul spoke of himself, and those with him, and the results that came about because of their ministry. Now, to confirm what he has spoken and as a lead-in to his comments of verses 2:2-12, he will give his words of this verse. His note of confirmation comes from the words "For you yourselves know..."

There was nothing hidden in their coming, and the believers at Thessalonica saw everything that occurred, as well as all that resulted from it. Because of this, they were fully aware of what Paul is referring to. Next he says, "brethren." In more modern translations, the masculine is being dropped for political correctness, but that is a silly way of translating Scripture. The masculine is used, just as it is in English, when speaking of the whole. It includes females if they are present. If only females are present, or if females only are being spoken to, then the words will be so addressed.

He then finishes the verse with, "that our coming to you was not in vain." Charles Ellicott notes that the words "not in vain" draw a bit too much attention to the result of their coming. Rather, it should be translated, "not vain." It then appropriately gives the sense of "not purposeless." Their coming was not powerless, but rather it was effectual in bearing fruit as was hoped for by any missionary who has the desire and intent of obtaining converts.

As noted above, Paul will spend the next verses explaining to them the conduct that he and his associates demonstrated among them, thus setting themselves as examples to be emulated.

Life application: When one wants to obtain certain conduct from others, it can be with a heavy hand, as if a bully, or it can be as one who sets an example for others to follow. Paul chose the

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latter when he came among a new group of people. He explained the gospel, and he lived out how one converted by the gospel should act. Rather than dictating to others what they should do, we should follow Paul's lead and act in accord with being a true saint, in a gentle manner and caring for those we minister to.

But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

1 Thessalonians 2:2

Paul had just said that his arrival, along with his associates, was not vain. Now, building on that, he says, "But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know..."

What this is saying is that such treatment would have caused most people to just give up. The spiteful treatment at Philippi that he is referring to is recorded in Acts 16:6-40. It included a public beating and imprisonment. After this, they next went along their mission route, arriving at Thessalonica. This is recorded in Acts 17:1-10. Despite this truly shameful treatment at Philippi, these men were not deterred in continuing on with their missionary work.

The words "as you know" are written as much for us as they are for those at Thessalonica. If what he said wasn't true, then any person who knew it could have simply said as much. But history bears out that the account occurred, and those at Thessalonica were fully aware of it. In other words, they knew what had occurred in Philippi, and it only more poignantly demonstrated the high caliber of Paul and his associates. They had no idea what type of reception they would receive as they proceeded, and yet they boldly continued on where no Christian missionary had gone before.

With their fortitude evident, he says that they "were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict." With a full trust in God that they were meant to continue the mission trip through Macedonia, they proceeded onward. Paul knew this to be true because of what it says in Acts 16:9, 10 –

"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them."

The Lord would not prompt them to go on such a mission if He were not going to be with them. The spiteful treatment at Philippi turned out to be exactly what was needed anyway. It bolstered confidence of those there who believed, it continued to confirm the legal

proclamation of the gospel, and it brought salvation to the jailer who was given charge over Paul and Silas (Silvanus).

Rather than being negatively affected and weakened by what occurred, Paul and those with him, understood that these things were divinely orchestrated. Thus, they were further emboldened. This was despite “much conflict.”

The Greek word translated as “conflict” is *agōni*. As you can see, it is where our modern word “agony” is derived. It indicates a contest or a struggle. In secular Greek, which his audience would have been thinking of, it speaks of a gathering to the Greek games such as the Olympiads. It is a great struggle as if they were in a battle or a wrestling match against the spiritual foes of the church, fighting for the precious saints that they were called to minister to. And yet, despite this struggle, they continued on, emboldened by God.

Life application: The book is written, the future is set, and we have an absolute surety that Christ is in complete control of our destiny. No matter what happens in this earthly life, we are safe and secure in His capable hands. As this is so, why would we be timid in our proclamation of Christ Jesus, or why should we care about what could happen because of it? Get up, go out, and speak! Jesus. It is all about Jesus!

For our exhortation *did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.*

1 Thessalonians 2:3

The word “For” is based upon the words of the previous verse. Paul and his associates were bold in speaking the gospel. It was an exhortation based in the truth of God. The word exhortation, *paraklésis*, is “a *personal exhortation* that delivers the ‘evidence that stands up in God’s court’ (HELPS Word Studies). Paul knew this. Therefore, the words of the gospel message they proclaimed, having been pronounced because they are God’s plan of salvation “*did not come from error or uncleanness.*” The preposition he uses, *ek*, gives the sense of “from” or “out of.”

If they are of God, then there could be nothing of error in them, nor could there be anything profane in them. The word for “error” gives the sense of deception which causes one to wander into sin. Obviously, if God’s plan is to bring man out of the bondage of sin, then His message will be completely free of such error.

The second word, translated as “uncleanness,” gives the sense of ritual impurity. This can come about by leprosy, an open infection, childbirth, touching a corpse, and so forth. Each of these was something described in the book of Leviticus. If such uncleanness required a sin-offering when it was over, then obviously it speaks of the general sin-nature of man evidenced

in such uncleanness. Again, the gospel is God's plan to bring man out of sin, and therefore the gospel is – in itself – completely free of uncleanness, and it is what makes complete cleansing possible.

Paul then changes the preposition for his last noun. Instead of *ek*, he uses *en*. It means “in.” Their message did not stem from personal deceit, as if they were trying to bait their audience. Here the word used is *dolos*. It gives the sense of using a decoy to snare people through deception in order to exploit them in their naive state. Paul is saying that the motives of himself, and those with him, were pure and without any cunning. Instead, they genuinely presented the gospel from their hearts, knowing that it is the one thing that can remove from them the emotional pain of a fallen life.

Elsewhere, Paul speaks of people who present false gospels, and also people who present the true gospel, but in deceit. The first he warns against in the most vehement terms. We are never to allow a false gospel to be presented without challenging it, and we are to have a sound enough knowledge of the real gospel to be able to do the challenging when necessary. For the second category, Paul shows little care. If the true gospel is being proclaimed, even if it is by someone who simply hopes to profit off the message, he knew that God would deal with such a person. His words concerning this are found in Philippians 1:15-18 –

“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: ¹⁶ The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; ¹⁷ but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁸ What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.”

Life application: Let us be fully versed on the true gospel, and also let us be ready and willing to defend against any false gospel. The soundness of the gospel message is far more important than trying to determine the heart of the person presenting the message. The Lord will deal with those whose hearts are not right with Him, but we have an obligation to deal with those whose message is not in accord with His word. Be prepared; know your Bible.