

“Full Assurance”  
1 Thessalonians 1:5  
(Preached at Trinity, March 17, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Verses 2-5** are a single sentence in which Paul is expressing his great joy in hearing of the steadfast faith of the new believers in Thessalonica. Paul and Silas had arrived at Thessalonica after being forced to depart from Philippi.
2. After leaving Thessalonica they traveled through Berea and then proceeded to Athens and then to Corinth.  
Paul was distressed, not knowing how these new converts were doing. In the face of so much hostility, were they enduring? Paul knew that the Jews were seeking to discredit him. Were the Christians at Thessalonica buying into their lies.  
He sent Timothy to minister to them and to bring back a report on how they were faring.
3. Paul was greatly encouraged and comforted at the report of their faith. His heart was filled with great gratitude as he heard of their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope."  
And he was filled with joy that they had not rejected his ministry.
4. Paul knew that this was a demonstration of the power of God in the Gospel.  
**1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU** - "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit"
5. Paul's confidence was always in the power of the Gospel to save.  
**Romans 1:16 NAU** - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."  
**1 Corinthians 15:1-2 NAU** - "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain."  
**1 Corinthians 2:4-5 NAU** - "my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."
6. Paul says several things in this passage of thanksgiving.
  - He expresses thanksgiving for the outward signs of their faith – **Verses 2-3**. Their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope."
  - He expresses his confidence in their election – **Verse 4**. Paul had this confidence because of the outward testimony of **Verse 3** but also of the power of the Gospel reflected in their reception of the Gospel in the midst of great opposition.  
**1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU** - "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit "  
**1 Thessalonians 1:9 NAU** - "how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,"

7. Then Paul adds the phrase, “with full conviction.” Interpreting this phrase presents the reader with some difficulties.
- Sometimes difficulties of interpretation stem from two thousand years of cultural differences.
  - Sometimes difficulties can result from linguistic difficulties—the difficulty of translating an ancient language into our own.

None of these things affect how we interpret this phrase. This means that perhaps it might have also been vague to the original reader. Paul knew what he meant but since it isn’t as clear to us, we must use all of our hermeneutical skills, and still recognize there may be some differences of opinion in how we determine the meaning.

We need to make certain that our conclusion is theologically accurate.

8. Paul says the Gospel came to them not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and “with full conviction.” (NASB)  
I don’t think Paul is talking about the conviction the Holy Spirit brings upon the heart as the Gospel is heard and received—the full conviction of sin. Although this rendering is consistent with our theology of Christian conversion and consistent with the NASB translation, it isn’t the meaning of this word.

9. The phrase is: καὶ [ἐν] πληροφορία πολλῇ

The word πληροφορία is most often translated “assurance” which is how the CSBO, KJV, and NKJV translate it. It is found three other times in the NT, each time translated “assurance.”

**Colossians 2:2 NAU** - "that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and *attaining* to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, *resulting* in a true knowledge of God's mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*,"

**Hebrews 6:11 NAU** - "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,"

**Hebrews 10:22 NAU** - "let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

It literally means “much assurance” but Paul also adds the adjective of degree - πολλῇ which serves to intensify the phrase. It’s like saying “very much assurance.”

10. William Hendriksen argues forcefully that Paul is referring to his assurance in the power of the Gospel. He writes: “it would seem that those commentators are wrong who confine this assurance to *the Thessalonians*.”<sup>1</sup> That is, referring to their assurance. But this is exactly who Paul is referring to in this passage.

In **Verse 3** he writes of their work of faith and labor love love, etc. . .”

In **Verse 4** he writes of their election

Now in **Verse 5** Paul says the Gospel did not come to them in word only but that it came to them in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance—in other words, “their assurance.”

11. Paul is applying this assurance to the Thessalonian hearers, but that doesn’t solve every difficulty with interpreting the phrase.

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<sup>1</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 3:51.

12. That leaves us with two possible meanings.
1. Paul could be talking about the assurance or confidence the Thessalonians had in the truth of the Gospel. This would be consistent with the importance of the witness of the lives of Paul and his companions. Paul's life validated the Gospel and assured them of its power.  
**1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU** - "just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."
  2. Paul could be talking of the assurance or personal conviction of the reality of our election and saving faith. This is consistent with Paul's words in **Verses 3-4**. In other words, their assurance of faith.
13. So which is it? I think we'd be safe to say, both. They are very similar. This morning I want to set before you both aspects.
- I. Our full assurance in the truth of the Gospel
  - II. Our full assurance in our salvation—that Jesus is my Savior.
- I. Our full assurance in the truth of the Gospel
- A. We've often heard, saving faith has three elements:  
In the Latin they are Notitia, Assensus, Feducia
    1. Notitia means knowledge. Saving faith demands receiving the facts of the Gospel. These would include the holiness of God, the Law of God, the failure of man to obey God's Law – our personal failure, God's wrath and condemnation upon sin, the Good News of God's love displayed through the work of Jesus Christ as Redeemer.
      - a. Mere knowledge, however, is insufficient.  
Paul says, "for our gospel did not come to you in word only"
      - b. Satan knows all of the facts of the Gospel. There are children raised in church who know all of the facts of the Gospel.  
There are many adults who think they are Christians because they know the facts of the Gospel.
    2. Second, saving faith includes Assensus – this simply means we agree with the facts. Simply knowing the facts and agreeing with them is not Christian salvation. Satan knows all the facts, and he knows they are true. He is convicted of the veracity of the Gospel. He is assured it is all true.
    3. Something more is needed. This is where the power of the Gospel is essential.  
**1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU** - "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"
      - a. The Holy Spirit convinces us of truth of the Gospel. He validates the veracity of the Gospel in our hearts. He convinces us of our desperate need of Jesus and His saving work. He enables us to see Christ as fully sufficient. He enables us to trust Him, rest upon Him, fix our hope upon Him.
      - b. Paul states here that the life of the person sharing the Gospel is a powerful testimony to the truth of the Gospel.  
**1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU** - "just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."

**1 Peter 2:12 NAU** - "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation."

**1 Peter 3:1 NAU** - "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of *them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,"

- B. Saving Faith demands absolute assurance that the claims of Christ are true.
1. During the life of Jesus multitudes trusted Him temporarily, but they were not absolutely convinced of His claims.
  2. While others fell away His apostles were convinced  
**John 6:1 NAU** - "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. <sup>67</sup> So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."
  3. Only a person who has full assurance that Jesus Christ is the only way of life will be willing to follow Him absolutely. Most people who call themselves Christians follow Him tentatively, partially, half-heartedly, sporadically. They are not "all in." But the one who is absolutely assured that Jesus is who the Gospel says He is will be willing to suffer and die for the Christ.  
**1 Thessalonians 1:6 NAU** - "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation"
  4. And only the person who has full assurance in the Gospel will boldly proclaim it with confidence that it is the power of God unto salvation.

II. Our full assurance that the Gospel has been applied to us – that Jesus is my Savior, that my sins have been forgiven, that Jesus loves me and gave His life for me.

- A. The Holy Spirit testifies within us that we are Christians  
 "in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"
1. Paul states this again in Romans  
**Romans 8:16 NAU** - "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,"
  2. And in Galatians  
**Galatians 4:6 NAU** - "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"
  3. The Holy Spirit convinces us that the promises of the Gospel are for you. Jesus Christ loves you. He died for you. You are precious to Him. And someday He will return to carry you away into eternity with Him. Paul is describing this great confidence through the Holy Spirit's working.  
**1 Thessalonians 1:5** - "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"

- B. If the Holy Spirit works full assurance in our hearts how come so many Christians lack assurance?
1. We can resist the inward work of the Spirit
  2. Paul spoke of “quenching” the Holy Spirit
 

**1 Thessalonians 5:19 NAU** - "Do not quench the Spirit"

    - a. The word for quench (σβέννυμι) means “to extinguish” as in putting out the flames of a fire.
    - b. Living according to fleshly desires is like pouring water upon a fire – it quenches the manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s work in your life. Paul says in Gal. 5:22
 

**Galatians 5:22-25 NAU** - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."
3. When our lives bear testimony to the saving work of Christ our confidence regarding our election is increased.
 

**2 Peter 1:10 NAU** - "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble"
4. A. A. Hodge – “Any man who thinks that he is a Christian, and that he has accepted Christ for justification, when he did not at the same time accept him for sanctification, is miserably deluded in that very experience.”
5. Our life testifies to what we are. It testifies that we are the sons of God
 

**Romans 8:13-14 NAU** - "for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

  - a. Paul is saying that those who seek only to satisfy and gratify the flesh they are bearing testimony of the ruination of their soul. But those who are striving to put to death the lusts of the flesh through the Holy Spirit they are bearing testimony of eternal life.
  - b. The Christian is the one who has entered into the battle of waging war against the flesh, against the world, against Satan.

### Conclusion:

1. This is the powerful work of the Gospel. It brings God's transforming grace upon the sinner, enabling him to believe and granting him the assurance of that work.  
**1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU** - "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"
2. This powerful work of the Holy Spirit works assurance within the Christian.  
 John Gill – "The preaching of the Gospel was accompanied with the powerful efficacy of the grace of God, working by it upon them; so that it became the power of God unto salvation to them; it came to them in the demonstration of the Spirit of God, and of power, quickening them who were dead in trespasses and sin, enlightening their dark understandings, unstopping their deaf ears, softening their hard hearts, and delivering them from the slavery of sin and Satan. It came by the power of the Holy Spirit to their souls, working and implanting his graces in them, as faith, hope, and love, and every other and he himself was received along with it, as a spirit of illumination and conviction, of regeneration, conversion, and sanctification, and of faith and adoption; all which gave full evidence of their election; and in much assurance."<sup>2</sup>
3. Although our assurance is increased as we witness the powerful work of the Gospel working in us, our ultimate assurance is not to be found by looking at the work of Christ in us but by looking to Christ.
4. The Gospel displays the tender mercies of Christ and the Holy Spirit convinces us that the infinite love of Christ has been directed towards us. We trust it and rest upon Him as our Savior. With saving faith, you are assured of the infinite love of Christ and that that infinite love has been directed toward you in particular.  
 Thomas Goodwin: "*Consider* the heart of Christ, as now he is in in heaven, sitting at God's right hand and interceding for us; how it is affected and graciously disposed towards sinners on earth that do come to him; how willing to receive them; how ready to entertain them; how tender to pity them in all their infirmities, both sins and miseries."<sup>3</sup>
5. The Gospel, by the power of the Holy Spirit, enables us to comprehend this, and rest upon it with full assurance.  
 Have you trusted in this gracious Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you resting upon Him alone?

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<sup>2</sup> Gill, John, *The Baptist Commentary Series Vol.1, John Gill's Exposition of the Old and New Testaments Vol. 9*, (Paris: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2006), 215.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), Pages 1-2.