



1 Thessalonians

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For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.
1 Thessalonians 1:5

The words “our gospel” don’t indicate that it is a gospel formulated by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, but that it is the true gospel which was first preached by them to those at Thessalonica. This occurrence is noted in Acts 17:1-3 –

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”

It is this gospel of Jesus which “did not come to you in word only.” These men came to Thessalonica with the intent of sharing the message of Jesus Christ, and they did it with words. This is the way in which the gospel is transmitted. It is a message which must be conveyed in order for others to understand. In the case of Thessalonica though, it came with more than just words, “but also in power.” The word is *dunamis*, a Greek word which, in this sense, gives the idea of efficacy. It had the ability to perform what was presented by converting the minds and souls of those who heard it.

There is no reason to assume that “power” here indicates physical manifestations of conversion. As seen from the citation above, they “reasoned with them from the Scriptures.” The power to convert was found in the word, “and in the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit is the Source of the word, and He is the one who makes the word understandable to those who hear it, converting them and sealing them when the word is believed. This conversion is a demonstration of the Spirit. When a person sees the complete change in another, they realize

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that it was more than just a personal choice, but a truly miraculous event. The sex-addict, the drunkard, the morally perverse... these people become a witness to the power of the Holy Spirit when they have a complete break from the path they were on because of hearing and receiving the gospel message.

Paul then says that the gospel also came “in much assurance.” When the message was heard, there was no doubt. The changes were sufficient to provide complete assurance that the power of God is truly found in the gospel message. It is a mystery which, when revealed in the longing human soul, has the ability to fully convert and completely convince. This message was presented by these men, not as a con-game or a scam, but – as Paul says – “as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.”

Their lives and actions substantiated that what they spoke was true. They didn’t just preach the gospel, they also lived it out. They were interested in saving souls for Christ, not getting rich off of Him. They were industrious, dedicated, and sincere. The very fact that Paul continued his outreach to them after he had gone (meaning in letter), shows that his concern for them was true. His letters to them, and to all of the churches, show that he desired that they would remember the gospel, be firm in their convictions, and grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such actions as these proved that he, and those with him, were not deceivers. Instead, they were sincere messengers of the most marvelous news of all.

Life application: What a shame people look for the sensational side of religion. Whether it is a crazy analysis of a passage (such as looking for aliens or UFOs in certain verses), or whether it is to fawn over someone who claims to have powers to heal or speak in garbled tongues that only he understands, it is not a sound way of approaching one’s theology. Rather, God’s demonstration of power is grounded in reality, and it is evidenced in converted lives which are holy, sound, reasonable, and dedicated to Jesus Christ. Let us live out our Christian walk in such a manner so that we too will be responsible bearers of this marvelous message.

And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 1 Thessalonians 1:6

The word “followers” gives the sense of imitation or emulation. It is used by Paul five times and once by the author of Hebrews. Those who came to faith in Christ became imitators of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy as just described in the previous verse. In so doing, they became imitators of them “and of the Lord.”

These three men were imitators of Christ Jesus, and those in Thessalonica followed suit, striving to emulate Him through the example they had seen in these three ministers of the gospel. Those in the church perceived the contrast between the infinitely glorious Lord, and

their own fallen conduct. They noted how Paul and those with them lived differently than the world at large, having submitted to Christ, and they then emulated what they saw.

Paul then notes they did this by “having received the word in much affliction.” This affliction is partly referred to in Acts 17:5-9. There was a great conflict over the presentation of the gospel. That conflict was initiated by the Jews who refused to believe, and it caused no little consternation. But those who did believe were actually strengthened in their faith through this, even to possessing “joy of the Holy Spirit.”

The furnace of affliction can, and often does, produce great joy in those who are so afflicted. This is all the more true for those who are in Christ. They see the conflict around them, and are comforted that this world is just a temporary abode. The promise which is found in Christ Jesus transcends this walk of woe, and it gives us comfort, and even joy, to know that we will be granted something far, far better when this earthly walk is complete. The choicest and richest blessings lie ahead for those in Christ, and so the joy of that thought is where we can put our hopes when the troubles of this world hem us in. This is what those in Thessalonica came to understand.

Life application: As a believer in Christ, we have the same troubles and trials as anyone else in the world. We are not exempt from times of sickness, loss, and frustration. However, these times of trial are temporary and will some day be behind us. For the world at large who believe this is all there is, of course bad times are a reason for being down. There is nothing else to look forward to, and so any troubles rob them of the precious few moments they believe they possess. But for those in Christ, a life of troubles is a moment which will pass away into eternal glory. O faithful Christian, don't let the world overcome your joy. Instead, because you have overcome the world, be filled with joy!

...so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

1 Thessalonians 1:7

This verse builds upon the words of the previous one. Together they read –

“And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.”

There is a minor dispute between Greek texts here as to whether this should read “examples,” meaning the individual members of the church, or “example,” meaning the church as a whole. What is probably correct is that it is the individuals who are addressed (the words are plural in the Greek) in verse 6. However, Paul could now be lumping them into one body and saying

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that as a group they are now an example to the others. Either way, nothing affecting doctrine is lost in either option.

Those at Thessalonica, having received the word and become followers of the Lord through that reception, had become excellent examples to the believers in both Macedonia and Achaia. They received the word in their affliction and were filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit in the process. The word “example” is *tupos*. It is the basis for the modern word “type.” Thus, they were a model church for others to see and to follow.

Thessalonica was an important city within Macedonia, and the example would be easily seen and emulated by other churches there. But their example went even as far as Achaia. That is the part of Greece where Corinth was the capital. The exemplary caliber of this group has become well known even to locations quite distant from them.

Life application: If someone is passing through your town and stops at church on Sunday, what kind of a message would they carry on with them concerning you and your congregation? Would they say, “What a great bunch of people! If you ever go through that town, stop and fellowship with them.” Or would they have words less friendly to say about you? Be aware of visitors that come to worship, and make an outward effort to treat them with a spirit of fellowship and joy in the Holy Spirit.

For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. 1 Thessalonians 1:8

The word “For” here supports his words of the previous verse which said that those in Thessalonica “became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.” He then says to them that “from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth.”

The word for “sounded forth,” *exécheó*, is found only here in Scripture. It indicates “to resound,” and it carries the idea of propagating. They had not just received the word, but they had sent it forth as well, telling the good news which they had believed. They were as the trumpet of God, calling out the word. This is similar to what is seen of the word going out to Israel in the Old Testament -

“Cry aloud, spare not;
Lift up your voice like a trumpet;
Tell My people their transgression,
And the house of Jacob their sins.” Isaiah 58:1

Likewise, Jesus' voice is said to be like a trumpet in Revelation 1:10. It is obvious that they possessed a desire concerning that which they had obtained. It was something they wished all others to believe in and grasp as well.

Paul then goes even further than his words of verse 7 by saying, "not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place." Paul could see that the conversion of those in Thessalonica was so strong, that wherever one of them traveled, they joyfully shared the good news, even in areas which were not culturally similar. They became, as it were, a missionary church. Just as Paul had gone as a missionary to them, they followed the pattern as they went forth from their home.

Paul then sums up the thought with the words, "Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything." It is a statement of the surety of the faith of those in Thessalonica. Their faith toward God was valid, and it then conformed to the words of the Great Commission given by Jesus. He said that His disciples should go and make disciples of all nations, and this is what they were willing to do. In the genuineness of their faith, Paul says, "so that we do not need to say anything."

This is a phrase Paul will use three times in this epistle, but nowhere else. It is an indication that where those from Thessalonica had gone and told the good news, there was no need to go and re-tell it. The word went forth, it went forth correctly, and it had met its intended purpose. Paul could feel satisfied in the surety of what the recipients of the message from those at Thessalonica had heard.

Life application: How excited are you about the gospel you heard and received? Are you willing to open your mouth and speak it out? If you've lost the fire you once had, redirect! Your words may be the only chance precious souls will ever have to hear the good news about Jesus. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.