

NOT IN WORD ONLY  
1 Thessalonians 1:5-8

Intro: The Apostle Paul saw the Lord work mightily in many places during his ministry, but probably in no place did he see greater blessing than in Thessalonica. The early verses of Acts 17 tell us that this church was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey. This was about the year 50 A. D. The church was made up of some Jews, many Gentiles, and Luke added in Acts 17:4, "and of the chief women not a few."

But we learn from 1 Thessalonians 1 that the church in Thessalonica influenced believers all through Macedonia (where Thessalonica was located) and over into neighboring Achaia. And then Paul added in 1 Thessalonians 1:8, "but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing."

Any believer today, or any church today, which is interested in making a difference in its generation, should ask, Why did Paul see such great blessing there in Thessalonica?

We need to ask such a question with caution because God does not necessarily work in every place the same way. In fact, we could say that He never really works the same way in two places, although there is often much similarity between what He does in one place as compared with another.

Paul, in the opening verses of this epistle, has stated what every servant of the Lord and every church need to know if the foundation is to be laid for a work of God, whether it be great or small. I am referring to Paul's words in 1 Thess. 1:5. (Read.) And I would direct your attention to his words, "not...in word only," or, "not unto you in word only." I suppose that in every generation there have been those who come up with some novel idea as to how people can be reached with the Gospel, or how churches can grow, but we are flooded with such people. But God's ways do not change. The basic upon which He has worked in the past remains the same. And so passages like this in 1 Thessalonians 1 not only are important because they tell us about Paul's ministry, but they tell us what we need to be concerned about in the work of the Lord today, or in any day.

Let us look at this verse in our time together tonight. I would call your attention first to the words:

I. "OUR GOSPEL CAME UNTO YOU."

Paul did not call it "our Gospel" because it was something

that he and Silas and Timothy had originated. No, it was the age-old Gospel which you will find throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Paul called it "our Gospel" because (1) he and his fellow-workers had received it for themselves, and (2) it was the message which they had been commissioned by the Lord to preach. It was the message of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul came to Thessalonica to tell the people there that the Son of God had come into the world to save sinners.

He did not come just to introduce a new religion. Nor did he come to oppose Judaism or any other religion. He came with a positive message of salvation through Christ. He believed that in the light of the Gospel people would see the hopelessness of any other message. He knew that wherever he was he did not need to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ because, as he told the Roman church, and probably told the people in Thessalonica, the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.

So if the Apostle Paul were teaching a class in Missions or Pastoral Theology, he would place heavy emphasis on the importance of preaching the right message. The servants of the Lord have no right, and should have no desire, to deviate from the Gospel message. But today when the very word Gospel is given different meanings, we need to remember that the Gospel is a message of Christ--"how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." And we could add to those words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth, the words of the Lord Jesus in John 3:16, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." If any man claims to be preaching the Gospel, but is not preaching that men are sinners, under the judgment of God, and that the only Savior from sin is Christ, then he is preaching a false Gospel. It is extremely important that we have the right message. We have no right to water it down to make it more acceptable to people. "Christ died for the ungodly," and, if you want to be saved, you have to line up with the ungodly!

But now let us go on to the next thing that Paul said in this verse:

## II. "NOT...IN WORD ONLY."

When he said, "not...in word only," he meant not just speaking the message. He did not say that he did not speak the message, but he was saying that there is more to preaching the Gospel than just delivering audibly the right message--although we must do that, as I have just pointed out. And he

mentioned what he had in mind at this end of this verse when he said, "As ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sakes." The character of the preacher is important. The motives of the preacher are important. Next to proclaiming the Gospel, and really of equal importance, is the character of the one bringing the message. And this is just as true of us when we are talking to one other person as it is when we address a group of people.

That last statement in verse 5 ought to interest us, especially the words, "for your sake." Did you ever think about what the godliness of your life would mean to others? Paul indicated here that one reason for us to be godly is because, if the people we are speaking to about the Lord are to be reached, then we have to be walking with the Lord. And yet Paul never took credit for what God did in the lives of others. See what he wrote in 1 Thess. 2:13. One of the greatest ways we have of convincing people that the Bible is the Word of God is when they see what the Gospel means to us, and what God has done for us through the Gospel.

This is one of the main reasons that the Lord spent so much time with His disciples teaching them what they should be, and how they should live. Listen to what he wrote to the Corinthian church in 2 Cor. 3:5, 6:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves  
to think any thing as of ourselves;  
but our sufficiency is of God;  
Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament;  
not of the letter, but of the spirit:  
for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

The ministry of the Gospel always suffers when what we are is not just as important as what we have to say. Even when we may be speaking to someone who doesn't know us, the Lord knows, and He is the One Who give the blessing. So it must be our aim to be and live so as to please the Lord. And it is in the Word where we learn what the Gospel is that we learn what we are to be, and how we are to live. Too often when we get concerned about ourselves we think more about doing than we do about being.

Paul did not go to Thessalonica to exalt himself, to make a name for himself, to get a personal following. He did not go there to get the people's money. He went there to tell the people about the Lord Jesus Christ, and to see people drawn to Christ.

But Paul did not leave the matter there. He went on to speak of:

### III. THREE IMPORTANT PARTICULARS OF HIS MINISTRY.

Paul went to Thessalonica, not just to proclaim a message, but he went there "in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance."

Let us make sure that we understand what he was thinking about.

#### A. "In power."

It is safe to say that the people of Thessalonica had never heard anyone speak with the power that the Apostle Paul had when he preached. It was not his eloquence, because from other passages it appears that Paul was not eloquent so that by his natural gifts he would have persuaded them. There was a divine power, which the people would not have been able to explain themselves. It was not a power manifested in the performance of miracles. It was power which the people felt in their souls as Paul set forth before them the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. The Gospel is powerful. A godly servant of the Lord is going to be powerful. And when people here the Word delivered by one who is walking with the Lord, things usually begin to happen, and people are saved.

The power comes when we do the Lord's work in the Lord's way. See what Paul wrote to the church at Corinth about his ministry among them. Cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-5.

Paul was not unique in this. Peter saw the power of God at work in his ministry, and there have been too many to mention from that day to this. We don't get this power so that we can be great soul winners. This power comes upon us as we walk with the Lord, and seek to be what He wants us to be.

But we can never talk about power in the Christian life and ministry without talking about:

#### B. "In the Holy Spirit."

Paul did not depend upon his personal charisma to turn people to Christ. He would not have been that foolish. He attributed the blessing that they had all seen in Thessalonica to the work of the Holy Spirit. Whenever the Holy Spirit is at work, the results are profound, and the results are permanent. I think that it is sad when we hear present-day evangelists speak of seeing as few as 10% of those making professions who really go on with the Lord, showing that they are genuinely saved. Is that what the Holy Spirit does—10%? Is that what happened in Thessalonica? There have always been those who profess, but do not possess. But when the Holy

Spirit is at work, then we see lives changed, really changed, eternally changed. We see people delivered not only from the penalty of sin, but from its power. True salvation never leaves a person the same, and true salvation never comes but through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts, and the Holy Spirit regenerates. Thessalonica was not the same ever again after Paul came with the Gospel which was so richly blessed by the Holy Spirit.

But there is another word:

C. "In much assurance."

Most of the more recent translations use the words, in much conviction.

I don't know of a great example of this than what Paul wrote to the church at Rome about his burden for the people of Israel. The way they treated him after he was saved you would have expected that he would have hated them--and he would have IF it had not been for the grace of God. But listen again to what he wrote in Romans 9, beginning with verse 1:

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not,  
my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,  
That have great heaviness and continual sorrow  
in my heart.

For I could wish that myself wee accursed from Christ  
for my brethren, my kinsman according to the flesh.

That is conviction, deep conviction--probably a deeper desire to see people saved than any of us has.

You find many statements of deep conviction coming from the Apostle Paul. Nothing could turn him aside from preaching the Gospel. When people listened to him, they would never get the impression that his message was a take-it-or-leave-it matter. They knew that it was a matter of eternal life, or eternal death, and they were constrained to listen, and many believed.

Concl: Paul has given us a lot to think about in this one verse, hasn't he? How we need his message in the church today.

What were the results in this case? I say, "in this case," because the Lord doesn't always work the same way. He didn't always use the Apostle like He did in Thessalonica. But how we are to be used does not determine the qualifications. Paul believed that these same principles were to be followed even when he was run out of town.

The first result was the change in the lives of the people. See verse 6.

The second was the influence they had in other places. See verse 7.

The third was the testimony that they had in those places. See verses 8 through 10. When God does a work in the hearts of people, we won't need to publicize it; the people who hear about it will spread the message far and wide.

In these days when a revival is so sorely needed, let us pay attention to what this Spirit-taught man said about how the Lord's work is to be done. Some of us may not even be spreading the Gospel even in word. We need to do that. But we also need to make sure that it is not just that and no more. May we seek by God's grace to be what the Lord wants us to be that we, too, may know about what it means to minister "in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much conviction." If we do the Lord's work in the Lord's way, there is no question but that we would see greater blessing.