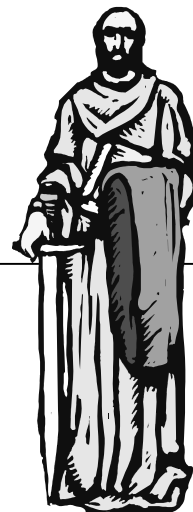


The Year of St. Paul

The First Letter to the Thessalonians



We take a quick review of the situation that led Paul, Silas, and Timothy to ultimately write this letter.

It is Paul's second missionary journey. Not having been received well in Philippi, it took courage to again enter another city with the hope of making a dent in the hearts and minds of Jew or Greek. They have been poorly treated, thrown out of some places, beaten in others. In Thessalonica it will not be any different. But there must be something we don't know. When Ephesus becomes their sanctuary for relief, this letter is quickly written to the Thessalonica Christians. And the second letter does not follow too far behind. So Paul finds the Thessalonians in some way special.

MAJOR THEMES OF THIS LETTER

Selection of Paul as an Apostle

When we consider that Thessalonica was a bustling place with many religions, many con artists seeking money — traveling religion shows claiming whatever made the people feel good, and those who claimed prophetic insight, Paul had a distinct advantage. He was a natural. He could speak a gospel from having experienced it in his own life. God had become very personal to him.

Paul was a sinner, a great sinner. What god on earth would have allowed him to live, let alone call him to become the Apostle to the Gentiles? It doesn't make sense, that is, unless that god is not created by man and is written with a capital 'G'. It is from the heart that this tentmaker finds the strength to proclaim a gospel of love, to share that, and to encourage others to enter into it. The core of the teaching of Paul is at the very core of his being — Jesus Christ.

As we hear Paul in this letter, we become aware that he is learning about himself and his role in the spreading of the kingdom. Just as he was an active participant in the Council of Jerusalem, so is he now part of this "network of evangelizers" spread throughout the known world. And these evangelizers — apostles and disciples — are fueled for success and encouragement by reports from one region to another. The Church was being unified early on.

Selection of the Thessalonians

In the same way, the early Church was being

unified by its support — shared within their community as well as with those of other communities. The support was an attempt to live the Word proclaimed and faith professed.

Those who accepted the teaching of Paul and Silas

are seen as "selected by God," having been given the same strength by the Holy Spirit

to discern the true God in their lives. The tenacity shown by those chosen to follow Christ is no different than what was shown by Paul and Silas while they lived and worked with them.

Paul and Silas acknowledge the reports from all across Macedonia, and directly from Timothy, to give praise and thanksgiving to God, and encouragement to the people. The Thessalonian faith is strong. Remember, Paul's concern for their ongoing faith caused him to send Timothy back to the city filled with those who would persecute Christians at a drop of a hat. Their devotion — whether Jew or Greek — was to be noted. It is only through the grace of God that anyone could be so strong. Paul knows this personally, and affirms it in this new community — especially the Jewish converts who would have received the strongest persecution.

Concerning Life in the Community

It is apparent that the persecution of Christians did not end after Paul and Silas left the city. We're told that the troublemakers followed them to Berea where false accusations created havoc with the proclamation of the Word. Yet it is this Word of God that bonds Paul and Silas with the Thessalonian community, and the individual members as one.

Paul knew that only through belief in the Word, and a constant desire to instill it firmly in life, would the community survive. His example was going to have to go a long way without his presence. The community of believers would also have to be content

GOD FIRST

Year Three, Part 7

September 14, 2008

with having to live in the world, work in the work, share the responsibilities of each other in the world with a lifestyle distinct from the culture that surrounded them. To do so was not an easy accomplishment.

The mutual charity for which Paul lauds the Thessalonians is rooted in the Word, which taught them to love one another.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Take a side step for one moment. Take note that the early Church is already connecting God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Our recognizing this development is important. While the definitive statement of faith, as we have it in our creed, will take years to finalize, God as Triune, that is, as Trinity, is being formulated as it is spoken and written. It is the same with the full phrase which describes Jesus — *“the Lord Jesus Christ.”*
2. The wording used in this letter is important. Familial terms, describing the relationship of Paul & Silas to the people as one akin to a nursing mother caring for her children (2:7) and a father acting on behalf of his children (2:11). Paul and Silas created this Christian community. They will take special care of it.
3. There is structure in this early Church. Paul exhorts the faithful to respect those *“...who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you, and to show esteem for them with special love on account of their work.”* (5:12-13)
4. As we reach the concluding prayer of Paul, he reminds the hearer that *“The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it.”* The meaning here is that of the believers being brought to be perfectly holy... (5:23) God is the mover, the doer, and the completion of all that is to take place.

PERSONAL ACCOUNTING

1. Paul is similar to us in that we are bombarded by many false teachings and enticements that make

Wheel taken from “Reading the Acts, Epistles and Revelation by Kingsley E. Dalpadado, OMI, St. Paul Editions

- religion one that brings satisfaction to a person in this life, missing the focus of living faith — praise of God. As an individual, what do I say when confronted by erroneous teaching or faith for happiness’ sake in this world?
2. Paul and Silas are encouraged as they hear from other parts of the world of the work the believers of Thessalonica are doing in living their faith. We know the Church espouses that we will not win any converts through proclamation of the Word alone, that giving living witness to the Word is essential. What does this say about my own involvement in the local Church? Does it support others or my own concerns?
 3. If the work of God is the only way in which I can be made “perfectly holy,” then what must I do to allow this to happen? Am I desirous of this? Or have I placed limitations on God’s working?
 4. The Word is powerful. It speaks to us as it did to others 2000+ years ago. How much time do I take to allow it to affect my life?