

“For Our Exhortation Is Not Of Error ...”

“For yourselves, brethren, know our entering in unto you, that it hath not bee found vain: but having suffered before and been shamefully treated, as ye know, at Philippi, we waxed bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation is not of error, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile but even as we have been approved of God to be intrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who proveth our hearts” (1 Thess. 2:1-4).

In the first two verses of this second chapter Paul describes his arrival in Thessalonica and his interaction with these who would become his brethren. It was not “vain;” he found ready ears and receptive hearts in this place — a comfort initially because of the ill-treatment he and his companions had received in Philippi where they had been shamefully treated — Timothy, Silas, and he. He had, upon the deceptive charge of irate slaveholders, been cast into prison without due process of law and due rights of a Roman citizen had been denied him, although there is no indication he asked for his rights in that incident. Perhaps God, who knows all things and could know that the jailor would become a Christian through their teaching, had a hand in all these proceedings just as he had had a hand in bringing Philip the evangelist and the Ethiopian eunuch together (Acts 8:26-31). Still, although they left Philippi under embarrassing circumstances, they were not intimidated by that unhappy (yet happy) circumstance. They were bold in their preaching in Thessalonica, which preaching proved to be in much conflict. The unbelieving Jews resisted Paul at every turn and when their hatred reached a boiling point and his very life was endangered, concerned brethren sent him by night to Berea where he found Jews far more amiable to the gospel: “Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Yet when news of his presence in Berea came to the ears of the disobedient Jews in Thessalonica, they went there to further persecute Paul and his company. making it necessary once more that Paul leave the city. Indeed, Paul could not have spoken more accurately: he was with the Thessalonians “in much conflict.”

Yet, although Paul was persecuted, none could truthfully charge that his message was designed to benefit Paul. He reminds the brethren that his exhortation “was not of error.” However much his opponents assailed his message, they could not counteract the fact that Paul’s message was God-approved. God had shown His endorsement of Paul’s words by empowering him to work miracles. In his opening statement of this epistle, the writer reminds them that this message had come “with power” (1:5). These pioneer preachers who brought an entirely new doctrine were empowered to work miracles, demonstrating God approved of the things they preached (Mk. 16:17-20).

As Paul’s message to the Thessalonians was not of error, neither was it of “uncleanness.” Idolatrous Gentiles were familiar with the fornication and uncleanness associated with the worship of their gods — a practice common all over the Roman Gentile world. But the doctrine of Jesus elevated its disciples to a higher, purer, and

nobler plane than the uncleanness associated with the worship of idols in Thessalonica. Paul wrote the Corinthians of their transition from paganism to Christianity, warning them that the “unrighteous would not inherit the kingdom of God.” Then he specified what he had in mind: fornication, adultery, and uncleanness. He adds, speaking of those wicked practices, “And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). The gospel lifts man to a higher level of God-approved morality.

Furthermore, Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians was not of guile. There was no subterfuge in his preaching. No hidden motive. Not self-elevating nor accruing wealth for self. To the contrary, the Thessalonians were preached to by these heaven-sent preachers who bore their own expense and through the labor of their own hands.

God approved of them and their message. It did not “set well” with the bulk of Jewish folk in Thessalonica. But Paul did not come there to please them with eloquent words of “feel good” messages. He came to tell them that the Law given by Moses was just a schoolmaster to lead them to Christ. He told his Jewish hearers that all their sacrifices were ineffective, for it “was not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). He told them that the Law was really a yoke on the disciples’ neck, an unbearable one which neither the present generation nor any past ones had been able to bear (Acts 15:10). He taught this because he was not there to please man; he was there to please God.

We might have been highly uncomfortable at the message this ancient gospel preacher proclaimed, but let us hope not. Remember, God tried Paul’s heart and his motives. And, He tries ours as well.

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