

“And For This Cause ...”

“... we also thank God without ceasing, that when you received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe” (1 Thess. 2:13).

Bear in mind that Paul was ever conscious that he was moved by the Spirit in the things he spoke and wrote. There is scarcely a letter from his pen which does not make such a claim for itself. To the Galatians he said that the gospel he preached among them came by revelation of God and that if someone preached a different gospel from it, he would be damned (Gal. 1:11ff). He further warned the Galatians that their turning away from the message he revealed to them was to turn away from the truth (Gal. 5:7). When Paul wrote the Corinthians, he said, “If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you that they are the commandment of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). The Ephesians were reminded “how that by revelation, was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Holy Spirit ...” (Eph. 3:2-5). Surely all are familiar with his words to Timothy: “All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16f).

The Thessalonians received Paul’s message to them as God’s word. There were consequences to face because they did; some of them severe and ongoing. There were persecutions and afflictions inflicted on them from their own countrymen (2 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:14). And, if like others in Macedonia, they were poor, in deep poverty (2 Cor. 8:1f). Yet, affliction and poverty did not rob them of either joy or hope. It is not likely that any other epistle of Paul speaks so frequently of Christ’s second coming. In all five chapters of 1 Thessalonians, Christ’s second coming is mentioned. True, they had some misconceptions about it (apparently having the notion that only those alive when Christ did come would share in the blessings of His coming, 1 Thess. 4:13-15), but they believed in that happy event and anxiously awaited it. Of course the message of a happy reception by Christ at His coming depended upon their submission to His gospel.

Having expressed the gladness that they had received his message to them as a message from God Himself, Paul added, “which also worketh in them that believe.” There is power in God’s word. The Hebrew writer said, “The word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). The word also is seed: the means by which we are begotten. Peter said, “Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever” (1 Pet. 1:23). In the parable of the sower with its four soils into which that seed was cast, Jesus explained, “Now the parable is this, the seed is the word of God” (Lk. 8:11). James said, “Of his own will he begat us by the word of truth” (James 1:18).

When Paul extolled the mercies of God as he was concluding the second section of his Roman letter (11:30-32), he entered the third (and last) division of his book with an appeal to those extended mercies that Romans present their bodies a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1). They were to be transformed (not conformed) to this world which was effected by the renewing of their minds. When Paul wrote the young preacher Titus, he spoke of God's kindness having appeared "not by works done in righteousness which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). The renewing of the Holy Spirit refers not to the Holy Spirit being renewed, but to the renewing (working) the Holy Spirit works. This "renewing" is in our minds, heart, and is not something done directly in our heart by the Holy Spirit, but rather through the Spirit's sword, the word of God (Eph. 6:17).

The word had "worked" in Thessalonians, at least in those who believed. It wrought changes in their lives, goals, loves, and masters. It continued to transform them, helping fit them for a heavenly home. But they had to let it work in them. So must we also.

Jim McDonald