

...with full conviction – What is more, those who are chosen by God are prepared by the work of the Ruach HaKodesh, the Holy Spirit, to receive the message of the Gospel resulting in eternal salvation. This act of “receiving the message of the Gospel” is real and necessary. For God is a relational God and His divine election and sovereign choice worked out by His sovereign hand in no way negates the necessity of the chosen individual to exercise the gift of faith and to fulfill the longing in their heart put there by God Himself.

... just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. – While there were plenty of “traveling philosophers” in the ancient world, traveling to “sell their ideas and wares,” Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy proved themselves to be genuinely concerned for the people of Thessalonica by not seeking from them any kind of “payment” or selling their wares. Rather, they sought to help them understand the truth of the gospel and did so in a way that proved to the people that they had no ulterior motives. By their desire to honor the Messiah Whom they served, they sought Him to supply their needs, even by providing employment.

Here we see, once again, the biblical pattern set forth for leaders and teachers within the local assembly of believers. Their lives must show forth their full dedication to the Lord, not doing their duties to gain personal prestige or notoriety, but first to give God the glory and thus to encourage, help, and direct the people they shepherd to find their ultimate fulfillment in God by serving Him in all aspects of their lives. Paul outlines the requirements for an overseer (ἐπίσκοπος, *episkopos*) in his epistle to Timothy:

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the *ekklesia*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1Tim 3:2–7)

These words of Paul need to be taken seriously in every era, and particularly in our modern times, when individuals who have very little biblical training or education, gain a following through their persua-

sive personalities and teachings. Yet when their teaching is laid next to the Scriptures, much is either missing or even contrary to what the word of God clearly states. The warning given by James ought to be taken seriously by those who believe God is calling them to take up the role of a teacher within a local assembly of believers:

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. (James 3:1)

6–7 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

These verses are clearly linked to the previous context and are governed by the word “for” (ὅτι, *hoti*) which begins v. 5, and also begins the list of supernatural events culminating in the salvation of those who comprised the believing community in Thessalonica. Paul has stated that (1) the gospel came with the power of the Ruach HaKodesh, (2) the example of Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus in their lives of faith and obedience showed forth the character of true saving faith, (3) as a result, it was made known to the Thessalonian believer, both by the teaching as well as the living examples of Paul and his partners, what true saving faith was, and (4) this enabled the Thessalonian believers to be good examples to others of the reality of saving faith and how the work of the Ruach results in a changed life and ongoing sanctification, i.e., becoming more and more like Yeshua.

Thus, the opening phrase of v. 6, “You also became imitators of us” must be understood to mean that Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy clearly were living out their faith, seen in their lives of obedience to God’s instructions, and thus were true examples of what God desires of all those He has redeemed unto Himself. In fact, the Greek translated in the NASB as “you *also* became” is the same Greek verb (γίνομαι, *ginomai*) translated in v. 5 as “we proved to be.” This highlights the fact that the sterling proof of their faith being genuine was that those things which characterized their daily living were significantly different than what characterized their lives before coming to faith in Yeshua. Thus, Paul’s words “imitators of us” is to be understood by the following “and of the Lord.” Thus Paul’s emphasis is that as they witnessed Paul and his companions living lives patterned after Yeshua Himself, their becoming imitators of them was ultimately to grow in having lives characterized

by the very life of Yeshua Himself.

Here, once again, we see the scriptures regularly teaching that the true mark of saving faith in Yeshua is that it reaches more and more to all aspects of one's life. It is not uncommon to see people in our times who believe that their attendance, once a week at a "church service," and their "religious participation" in the public gatherings of the church, are proof of their having obtained eternal salvation.

Note that the Thessalonian believers "received the word (of the gospel) in much tribulation," yet this did not diminish the joy they experienced by the work of the Holy Spirit. Here we see one of the true marks of genuine salvation: even when tribulation comes, the true believer in Yeshua will be strengthened and encouraged to remain steadfast and valiant in their life of faith. Surely there may be times of despair and even questioning, but the mark of truly being born again is that one perseveres in faith and in so doing, has their faith strengthened even more. What God promises his chosen ones is that He will aid them in times of trouble, giving them the ability to persevere, not that those He saves will no longer face difficult times or even tribulation.

Note Paul's inspired words in his epistle to the Romans:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Yeshua Messiah, through Whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:1–5)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. (Rom 12:12)

Likewise James teaches the same truths:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2–4)

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)

Such clear biblical teaching regarding the fact that true saving faith is a faith that perseveres, even in times of tribulation and conflict, also highlights the necessity and great value of regularly being together with other believers in a believing community. For it is within the community of believers that prayer for each other, life-to-life encouragement, and even loving but direct confrontations are used by God to bring correction, to strengthen one's faith and thus to persevere when experiencing trials of various sorts and magnitude.

The author of Hebrews admonishes us with these inspired words:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb 10:23–25)

... so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. – Here Paul encourages the Thessalonian community of believers by affirming that their persevering faith, seen as characterizing the community as a whole, had a positive effect on and ministry to the believing communities in Macedonia and Achaia.

In the Greek, the word “in” (ἐν, *en*) is found both with “Macedonia” and with “Achaia,” thus including both of these ancient provinces which would therefore stand for the whole of ancient Greece, which would include all of modern Greece and at least the southern part of modern Macedonia. As Fee notes:

Paul is well aware that word about the gospel and its affects in Thessalonica had spread like wildfire among the Jewish synagogues in Greece, and therefore especially among the Gentiles who attended the synagogues. And as the word spread, the Thessalonians served as a “model” of “faith in the midst of suffering” as the gospel continued west and southward. Thus Paul sees them, like a stone thrown into the water, as fitting into an ever-widening circle of “models” to be “imitated”: Christ ➔ Paul ➔ Thessalonica ➔ Macedonia and Achaia.¹

1 Gordon Fee, “1&2Thessalonians” in the *NICNT* (Eerdmans, 2009), p. 41.

8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

Paul uses the phrase “word of the Lord” to characterize the whole message of the gospel centered in Yeshua, the promised Messiah through Whom, via His substitutionary death, His triumphant resurrection, His ascension and heavenly intercession, all who have been given to Him would believe, having the penalty for their sins fully paid, be endowed with the indwelling Spirit, become living witnesses of God’s infinite love and grace, and would dwell forever with Him throughout eternity.

The phrase “has sounded forth” utilizes the Greek verb ἐξήχεω (*exēcheō*), found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures, but which may well bring into the picture the sound of a trumpet. The point is that the witness of the Thessalonian believers had become well known, not only in the borders of ancient Greece, but apparently even beyond. Since Greece was a major power in the world of Paul’s day, it may be that the testimony of the Thessalonian communities and their fervent desire to make the glories of God and the message of His salvation known, had extended even beyond to other regions as well.

If by using the Greek verb *exēcheō* Paul intended his readers to picture the sounding of a trumpet, then this may also emphasize that the Thessalonians had not only received the teaching of Paul as the truth regarding God’s gift of salvation, but that they had likewise become a strong voice to others, carefully living out and giving the same message of God’s method of salvation which they had received. This would bring to mind Paul’s teaching on the issue of “tongues” and that true communication requires understandable speech. He then illustrates his point by the analogy of a signal trumpet which was used to announce a gathering, or a warning, or a call to arms.

For if the trumpet (σάλπιγξ, *salpigks*) produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? (1Cor 14:8)

By analogy, it was the clarion call of the gospel that had sounded forth from Thessalonica, a call that correctly announced the glorious and true message of the gospel as centered in the saving work accomplished by Yeshua, fulfilling the will of the Father, and applied through the work of the Ruach to all who received by faith the “good news” of the gospel.

When Paul says that their faith “in every place...has gone forth,” he

must have in mind the regions of the West Bank, Syria, and Asia Minor. This would indicate that the Thessalonian communities were active in giving forth the gospel to many who came through their strategic location.

It should be borne in mind that the populous trading-center, Thessalonica, was so located (on the Egnatian Highway, thus linking the East with the West, and at the head of the Thermaic Gulf, thus connecting it with harbors all over the then-known world) that news could spread very quickly to regions far and near. All the believers at Thessalonica had to do was avail themselves of the opportunities which their strategic location afforded.¹

Here once again the Scriptures teach us the truth regarding the saving work of God. For salvation by faith in Yeshua is first something that is applied to the individual by faith, but what inevitably follows is the transformation of the believer who inevitably becomes more and more conformed to the very person of Yeshua Himself. The pace may differ regarding the progress of a true believer in Yeshua becoming set apart from the world and conformed to the likeness of Yeshua. Yet one thing is certain: all who are truly born from above will progress in sanctification, that is, become more and more set apart to God in all aspects of one's life. Surely this is the message Paul is giving us in his praise for the Thessalonian community and their evident growth in becoming valiant witnesses for Yeshua. Having been "made new" through God's grace in Yeshua, through the work of the Ruach, received by faith, they had progressed to be living witnesses of His saving power and love.

...so that we have no need to say anything. – Here Paul sums up his good report regarding the Thessalonian community and the genuine faith by which these believers were known by making it clear that he and his fellow workers had no need to "fill in the gaps" regarding the reality of their transformation from darkness into light. The transforming work of the Ruach was evident to all.

How wonderful it would be if this could be said of all our local communities of faith! Oh that our lives, even more than our words, gave forth the "sound of the trumpet" calling all who witnessed our community life to be drawn to inquire about what enabled our success and would then be open to hearing the glorious message of the gospel in Yeshua.

1 William Hendricksen, *Commentary on 1Thess.* in *Hendricksen-Kistemaker NT Commentary* (Baker, 1955), p. 54.