
But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal 6:14)

...because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater – Here Paul rejoices in the success of the community, not measured on how many people attend, or if the “offerings” have increased, but on the evident growth of the people’s faith as seen in their lives being more and more conformed to the truth of God’s word. Faith is enlarged as believers desire more and more to be like their Lord, committing themselves to make the ways of the Lord real and lasting in all aspects of their lives.

The primary evidence of their “faith being greatly enlarged” is first and foremost, their genuine love for each other. The enemy is always striving to cause division within the local assembly of believers, because divisiveness is the opposite of obeying God Who commands us to care for each other and even to bear each other’s burdens.

Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the Torah of Messiah. (Gal 6:2)

One of the most prevalent failings that stands in the way of truly loving one another as God intends, is the sin of gossip or “*lashon hara*” (evil speech). It is so easy to fall into the trap of gossip when someone has hurt us or we see someone acting in a wrong way that they hope to hide.

Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the Torah and judges the Torah; but if you judge the Torah, you are not a doer of the Torah but a judge of it. (James 4:11)

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Eph 4:29)

Consider the words of James in his Epistle where he teaches that the ability to control the tongue is a genuine mark of spiritual maturity (3:2); that the tongue is like a fire, able to set an entire forest ablaze (3:5) and able to burn all the other members of the body, defiling them and even setting their course of life on fire. He boldly states that the

slandering tongue is set on fire by hell itself (3:6). He calls the tongue “a restless evil and full of deadly poison” and chastens his readers with the thought that with the same tongue we bless the Lord and curse our fellow man who is created in His image (3:9). Clearly, James recognized that *lashon hara’* could easily do severe damage to the cause of Messiah. He therefore warns the Messianic community in his time, as well as warning us, about engaging in evil speech.

How might we define *lashon hara’*? What is it? Evil speech, in its simplest definition, is talking about a person in such a way as to degrade them in the eyes of others. Even if what is being communicated is true, to do so may constitute slander, for we are called upon to love one another, and love seeks to cover rather than broadcast a person’s faults: “...love covers a multitude of sins” (1Pet 4:8). Moreover, Yeshua taught us that if a brother has sinned, we are to go to that person privately, and even take a second person with us if rebuffed. Only when the sin is unchecked and unresolved is the matter to be made know to the whole assembly (Matt 18:15ff).

We should be careful, however, not to think that disagreeing with someone constitutes *lashon hara’*, so long as we can disagree without attacking the character of the person with whom we disagree. For instance, authors and teachers who write and put their writings into published formats should expect that there will be those who disagree with their methods as well as their conclusions. Disagreeing in a civil and careful way (meaning not resorting to *ad hominem*¹ attacks) is not *lashon hara’* even if the disagreement is sharply stated.

4. ...therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the *ekkle-sia* of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.

A primary result of the Thessalonian community living out their faith in Yeshua was that they were doing well in helping each other maintain a strong and growing faith, evidenced by their caring for each other and thereby enabling the community as a whole to be a witness of God’s saving grace and love. It was the outward evidence of a genuine commitment to help each other grow strong in their faith that brought Paul and his associates to of them.

Here, the NASB translates the Greek ἐγκυχαῖσθαι (< ἐγκυχαῖομαι) as “speak proudly,” a Greek word found only here in the Apostolic Scrip-

1 *ad hominem* is a Latin phrase essentially meaning “an attack aimed at an opponent’s character” in order to prove their viewpoint as errant.

tures, which means:

“to be proud of someone or something and express oneself accordingly, to boast.”¹

Surely, when Paul states that “we speak proudly of you,” he is not seeking to set himself and his co-workers forward as being the source by which the Thessalonian believers were bearing genuine marks of saving faith. Rather, his “boasting” was in the sovereign and loving hand of the Lord by Whose power these new believers’ confession of faith in Yeshua was being shown to be genuine by their manner of life and their open confession of Yeshua as their Lord and Savior.

We remember that at the closing of his first epistle to the Thessalonians, he mentions that there apparently were some within their community who were struggling in their faith and had even evidenced being “weak” in terms of persevering, perhaps because of failures.

We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. (1Thess 5:14)

Thus, his words of praise and encouragement in the opening of his second epistle to the Thessalonian community, may well have been prompted to lift up the community as a whole, and especially those who may have been experiencing weakness of faith and questions relating to whether they had truly been received by God as redeemed by the work of Yeshua.

among the ekklesia of God – Undoubtedly Paul and his associates were sharing with other communities how evident was the work of God by His Spirit within the Thessalonian community of believers, and therefore pointing to them as a model for other communities to follow, just as he had mentioned in his first epistle to the Thessalonian community.

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. 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. (1Thess 1:6–8)

1 BDAG, “ἐγκανυχάομαι,” p. 273. Compare Ps 51:3; 73:4; 96:7; 105:47 in the Lxx which uses this same word with the meaning “to boast.”

In our times, it seems that all too often when a local community of believers in Yeshua is established and begins well, in time they experience division among themselves, a division that is often fostered and enlarged by *lashon hara'*, i.e., "gossip."

Thus, Paul's emphasis here, as he expresses his joy regarding the evident love among the believers in Thessalonica, is that this ought to be the normal pattern for all communities who confess Yeshua to be their Lord and Savior. We must reckon then with the fact that to engage in gossip (*lashon Hara'*) means to give in to the enemy's design for division within the believing community, and therefore to undermine the very goal of pointing the world to Yeshua as the true Savior of all who are His.

...for your perseverance and faith – The Greek for "perseverance" (ὑπομονή, *hupomoné*) is made up of two words: the preposition *hupo*, meaning "under" and *moné*, meaning "to remain." Thus, to remain under the pressure and not to "give up" in order to escape the "difficulty," is a way of describing genuine saving faith, which ultimately is evidenced by "remaining obedient and faithful regardless of the cost."

... in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. Likewise, when Paul points to their "faith" as that for which he and his colleagues are proud and about which they give testimony to other established communities of faith, he doubtlessly means "their faithfulness" to the Lord. For remaining faithful to the Lord in all aspects of life, and especially in times of intense persecution, is the ultimate "litmus test" proving one's faith to be genuine. For surely the Lord gives His own both the desire and ability to remain faithful even in times of intense persecution.

This is why we must always commit ourselves to an on-going strengthening of our faith in Yeshua, believing that He has redeemed us and we are His, and that therefore He will always give us the spiritual strength necessary to persevere in our faith regardless of what we must endure in this fallen world. And how do we continue to grow stronger in our faith? We do so by committing ourselves to remain faithful in all aspects of the "means of grace." God's grace to His own is increasingly experienced as they dedicate themselves to utilizing the very means God has given to His children to be strengthened and to persevere. In sum, the "means of grace" include: a life of prayer, the study of and meditation upon God's word, and consistent gathering and commitment to a community of believers where the Scriptures are taught and applied.

This means that we should never allow ourselves to be defeated by fear of what could take place in the future. Even if we were to face per-

secution for our faith, God has promised that He would enable us to do so for His glory, strengthening our faith and endurance by His grace and power. Yeshua promised:

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (Jn 16:33)

5 – *This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.*

That the NASB puts the opening “This is” of our verse in italics is done to note that these words are not actually in the biblical text itself, but are added to show that the syntactical arrangement of v. 5 clearly links it as a concluding statement to that which is stated in vs. 3–4.

The opening word in the Greek is *ἐνδειγμα* (*endeigma*), translated by the NASB as “a plain indication,” and is a word which is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures and carries the sense of “the proof of something, evidence, plain indication.”¹ Thus the words which the NASB adds as an explanation of the Greek. But the question is: “what is an indication of God’s righteous judgment” in this context? It clearly is the ability of the believers in Thessalonica to persevere in their faith through such trials, for that is the “acid test” of their faith. As Yeshua taught:

Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. (Matt 24:11–13)

... so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God – Such ability to “persevere,” even under great duress, is the gift of God’s grace for all who are truly His and is therefore a genuine “litmus test” of true saving faith. For God’s “righteous judgment” is that which is always, 100% of the time, true and accurate. He knows (i.e., has covenant relationship with) those who are His, for He has purchased and redeemed them through the infinite price of Messiah’s death, resurrection, and intercession, applied by the Ruach, for all whom the Father has given to Him.

1 BDAG, *ἐνδειγμα*, p. 331.

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” (Jn 6:37-40)

Given this magnificent truth of God’s love and eternal purpose for all He has given to the Son, the believers in Yeshua need never fear that they will fail the test if required to endure persecution, even unto death. For we know that if we are to endure such a trial, the Lord Himself will grant us the ability to persevere and thereby to be witnesses of His grace and power.

... *for which indeed you are suffering*. – The believers in Thessalonica had already proven the reality of their faith by enduring suffering as genuine children of God (v. 4). Here Paul reminds the readers in his epistle of something they already know well, i.e., an experience they have in common with Paul, Silas, and others. For we know from Luke’s words in Acts that they also endured persecution for their faith in Yeshua. Paul and Silas had to escape by night the mobs in Thessalonica who were intent upon silencing them (Acts 17:5–10). In Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians he recounts:

Are they servants of Messiah? — I speak as if insane — I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. (2Cor 11:23–24)

And what is one of the “proofs” of a person being chosen by God, to be His for all eternity? It is that if a believer is required to suffer for their faith in Yeshua, they will be empowered to do so by the Ruach HaKodesh, and thus strengthened and enabled by the very hand and omnipotent sovereignty of the Almighty to endure the trial, therefore being a witness of God’s power and grace.

Moreover, that this is a truth established in the Scriptures themselves, the child of God need not fear the future or the unknown. For believing that God will inevitably enable all who truly are His to persevere if trouble comes, gives the believer in Yeshua the strength to endure persecution and in doing so, to be a living witness of God’s power, love, and mercy.