

Being the People of God: Thanksgiving

1 Thessalonians 1:1-2:12

I. Being the people of God is a life of thanks; 1:1-5.

1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. 2 We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

In giving thanks and praying for the Thessalonians, Paul mentions their faith, love, and hope which describes the essentials of Christianity. Faith is the assurance that God has saved His people in Jesus. Love is the expression and experience of a new relationship between God and His people. Hope is the confidence that God who began a good work will bring it to completion, and that the future, salvation and not judgment, awaits His people through our Lord Jesus Christ. That “God loved us so much that while we were sinners Christ died for us” reminds us how highly God loves and values His church and the believers who comprise it - despite our sin and failures.

Some pride themselves on the way they proclaim the gospel, but they undermine their witness by neglecting to live it out. Others say they share the gospel by the way they live, but they undermine their witness by failing to tell anyone what it is they believe in, and how they can experience salvation. The Thessalonians were sharing both the good news about Jesus verbally and also demonstrating the impact of that good news in their own lives.

II. Being the people of God is from the gospel; 1:6-10.

6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and

to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Paul states he knows that the Thessalonians have truly placed their faith in Jesus. They welcomed the message. They accepted the gospel by placing their faith in Jesus. They then became imitators both of the missionaries and Jesus. Despite severe suffering, they experienced a supernatural joy given by the Holy Spirit. Jesus delivers from the coming righteous judgment of God against sin. The rescue or deliverance of believers from the coming wrath is built on Jesus' death on their behalf.

We must count the cost of following Jesus and decide that it really is worth suffering to be His disciple. We need to acknowledge His death and resurrection as the only basis of our salvation. Jesus' life and teachings are the model by which we live.

III. Being the people of God changes our motives; 2:1-6.

1 You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. 2 We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed--God is our witness. 6 We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you,

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that his appeal to them did not involve delusion, impure motives, or trickery. God is the one who has examined and approved them, and they are responsible to Him, not to the crowds. As the people of God, we must live in a way that our true motives are obvious to those we are seeking to have a gospel conversation with and minister to.

IV. Being the people of God requires us to work on relationships; 2:7-9.

7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 9

Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

Paul describes their behavior as being gentle, caring, and loving. For the sake of the gospel, he avoided behaviors that could call into question the integrity of the gospel. On the one hand, their speech was bold and forceful, and on the other hand, their actions were characterized by gentleness and care, and motivated by love.

Our relationships with others need to be based on what is best for the gospel. Therefore, there are behaviors, demeanor, and attitudes that we must avoid at all costs, because they could hinder the gospel message.

V. Being the people of God transforms our behavior; 2:10-12.

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Because his behavior was correct in the sight of both God and humans, Paul can say he acted blamelessly, that is, no charge can be brought against him when he is examined by God. Paul's parent-like actions are so that the Thessalonians might live a life that is worthy of God, a life that reflects the character of and brings honor to the God and His gospel.

Proclaiming the gospel is the task that God has entrusted to us. It is God who tests our hearts, not someone else. That is why we should make it our priority to please God as a servant of Christ.

We are to model a clear concern for the integrity of the gospel. Integrity is not something that happens by itself. It involves the hard work of discerning what is right from God's Word and living consistently. We find it much easier to talk a good game than to walk one.

We are to live out God's love and commitment to those to whom we minister. We are to minister by encouraging and comforting, as though they were our own children.