

The Thessalonian Christians Recognise Genuine Gospel Preachers

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[0 : 00] Well now, just before we turn to Scripture, let's just bow our heads in prayer. O God, our Father, may your kingdom come.

May your will be done on earth as in heaven. O Lord, salvation is of you from first to last. And we bless you for your sovereign grace.

We recognize that it is entirely unmerited by us. We are debtors to you and to your grace. We bless you, O Lord, for the gifts that are freely given to us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we covet such gifts for others too. We think about those who are responsible for the ruling of the nations. Those who are in the political arena.

Those who lead our own prime minister and cabinet. Those in government and in opposition. And those who lead in the nations, O Lord.

[1 : 09] There are some we know who are persuaded that they are to foster views that are not only anti-Christian but anti-God.

And we pray, O Lord, that you would teach the people your ways. We remember how by the Spirit the psalmist said long ago. Now, therefore, you kings, be wise.

You judges of the earth. Serve God in fear. And we pray, O Lord, that those who lead may recognize through your word given that you alone are God.

We give you thanks, O Lord, that you are able to persuade men of this. And we pray that to this end your Holy Spirit of promise may be at work in a mighty way.

Teaching people your ways. Revealing to them through the Holy Scriptures the things that do make for their peace with you. And for the promotion of right standards in the world today.

[2 : 23] O Lord, our God. We pray that you will remember those who are committed in their lives to caring for the sick and the suffering and the dying too.

And we pray that they may have a sense of real purpose and fulfillment in what they do. They are at the cutting edge of difficulties and of handling folk whose lives are even more fragile than most.

And we pray that in it all they may be confronted not only with death, but with the life that is given in Christ. We thank you that he himself is a resurrection and the life.

And we pray that people in these caring professions, many more of them, may know the power of his resurrection in their lives. We pray too, O Lord, for the huge problems that confront the nations.

The people in Chile, we remember them today. In these cities that have been affected by the earthquake and its aftershocks and so on.

[3 : 43] We pray for all those who are helping to relieve the suffering. To care for the dying. We remember too the situation that has gone off the news media screen, as it were, in Haiti.

We know that the difficulties there are mega. And we pray, O Lord, that in your great goodness and mercy, you will touch people's lives and speed on the efforts made to restore that nation.

O God, above all things, may your word flourish in these days. May people come under its healing power, its transforming power, so that people may live to the glory and the praise of God.

Be with us then and bless us as we wait upon you now. In Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen.

Well, now let's turn to 1 Thessalonians, where we've been studying, and chapter 1.

And we'll just read from the beginning again. And just to remind you of the context here that Paul wrote around 51 AD with reference to the work of God through him and through Silas and Timothy.

[5 : 20] And he wrote this first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of our God and Father.

Knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

I want us to think today on the second part of verse 5, where Paul says here, As you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

And I want to think about this in terms of the Thessalonian Christians recognized genuine gospel preachers.

[6 : 53] And I want to say at the outset that those who are true followers of Christ and those who are true preachers of the good news in Jesus Christ, not only share certain beliefs as regard to the truth about God and about Jesus and about human nature and its need to be renewed and so on, but they share this, that they know that they are to live a life according to the truth of the gospel, the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

And that these teachings are entirely consistent with what we call the Old Testament scriptures. And the reference here, of course, is very much to Paul reflecting on how he and his fellow missionaries arrived in Thessalonica and they saw, under God's blessing, a wonderful transformation in the people there, in many of them anyway.

But, of course, in those days in the Roman Empire, there were traveling preachers and philosophers going everywhere, and they were, as it were, wanting people to listen to them and consider the message they brought.

And they sought to persuade people, of course, to follow them. We've got the best story, follow us. That sort of idea. And the thing about this is that these roving preachers, we may call them, were people who were in it for the many.

They had to make a living as they saw it. And they wanted to, what we would say, maximize the potential of their opportunity. They wanted to make the most of it.

[8 : 51] And so they went around peddling their philosophies, wanting people to listen, to follow them, and to fund their campaigns, and so on.

Now, when Paul and Silas and Timothy went to Thessalonica, they went there, not for the many of it, not for the prestige of it.

They went as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you may recall that Paul actually had planned not to go west at all, but he had planned to go east and northeast.

And the Spirit of God directed him westward. And he eventually landed in Macedonia and moved to Thessalonica.

And he picked up Silas and Timothy, of course, went with them on the way. And what they saw in Thessalonica was not something that happened because of their own abilities.

[9 : 58] But something happened when the Spirit of God worked through them. And a huge transformation occurred in many in that city, that important trading city of Thessalonica.

People were touched by the good news in Jesus. And it's interesting, although Paul can talk about the transformation in terms of belief of the truth, they received the word.

Verse 5, our gospel did not come to you in word only. Obviously, it had to come in word. It was a communication of the message. But it wasn't that they were attracted to the style and the philosophy of these preachers.

No, no. There was something different going on. God was at work. The word came not in word only, but in power in the Holy Spirit and with much assurance.

Preacher and hearer alike, as we saw, knew something had gone on. God was at work. But, and this is where we're focusing today.

[11 : 11] But, the message that Paul and Silas and Timothy brought was not a message unconnected with themselves. And it was the quality of their lives that, as it were, almost under God's blessing, cleared the way for the Thessalonians to listen to them, to take them seriously.

The quality and genuineness of their lives, of these three evangelists, as it were, shone through. And the people just knew they were not in it for the many of it.

They were not in it to make a name for themselves. They were in it because Christ, Jesus, had called them to it. And the focus in Thessalonica, all from different backgrounds, saw that this message changed these men.

It made their lives different. And they listened to them. And I think there's something we can learn from this ourselves, as regards both false teaching and living that is out of keeping with the gospel. And, on the other hand, we can look at the true preaching and teaching of the word and the lives of those who proclaim that word. And so our first point, our starting point is, false preacher teachers abounded.

[12:47] Well, we've already said, and of course, if you want to get the background to this, you've got to read the book of Acts. And earlier on in our studies, we were looking at chapter 17 of Acts to give us a bit of the background.

But I say again, false preacher teachers abounded in those days. There were folk going around, both out with the church, but within it too, roving preachers.

They were all over the Roman provinces. And they were in it for a living. They were in it for the many.

They were in it for position. And such people crept in among God's people for advantage. They wanted to take advantage and to get disciples to follow them.

And of course, the church community that was growing was just an ideal niche for them to tap into.

[13:59] Just let me give you three we'll do just now to illustrate this point. Paul talks about those from the Jewish myths and fables school.

This has got a modern ring, believe me, if you know anything about rabbinical Judaism. It's got a very modern ring. If you know anything about the New Age movement and other philosophical speculative movements, you'll know that this has a modern ring as well.

It's not old, outdated finish. Not a bit. The Jewish myths and fables school aimed their doctrine at those who had a speculative turn of mind.

Those who liked to perform mental gymnastics. They liked to work at different views of things.

There was a smattering of truth in it, of course.

Just to draw people in. But the speculations wooed people. Not towards Jesus, but away from Him. Not towards the Word of God, but away from it.

[15:13] Into speculations. If you've talked with Mormons on your doorstep or JW's, you'll know that they want to introduce to you things that are outwith the Bible.

Or in the case of the JW's, their version. And that is about moving away from the Word of God.

The scriptures of the Old and New Testament. It's about drawing people into speculative thinking.

And they were around. Paul, in talking to Timothy, warns about the destructive doctrines that these folk bring in.

The old version called it damnable heresies, which really meant heresies that would lead people to a lost eternity.

And he urged people to be watchful, to watch out for the logic of that. It would lead people not only astray, but at last to ruin.

[16:23] But more subtle were the Judaizers. Those who were within the church, who accepted that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament scriptures.

And they said, well, we have to believe on him. That's true. You have to receive him as the Messiah. But there was a bet, you see. There was a qualification in it.

But, you see, you must embrace the religious ceremonies of the Jewish religion. They go way back, and you've got to keep them.

For the males, circumcision was imperative. Except you be circumcised, you cannot be saved.

It was as blunt as that. And then there were all the other ceremonies within Judaism, and they were added to, you must keep these things. And this went on beyond people who were born Jews.

[17:26] It went to the Gentiles who were now coming in. And so, what you've got is the most corruptible and corrupting teaching.

And it's this. It's a simple equation. It's Christ plus this, this, or this in order to salvation.

And you remember that the letter to the Galatians was written against all that. It was written, this is more or less, as you know, Galatia, as it then was, was part of modern Turkey.

And the churches of Galatia in the north and the south were influenced by this Judaizing influence. That's why Paul could say to the Galatians in chapter 3 those unforgettable words, O foolish

Galatians, who has bewitched you before whose eyes Christ was clearly portrayed crucified. This only would I learn from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law? In other words, did you receive the Spirit believing on Jesus Christ by ticking the right boxes?

[18 : 51] I kept this law, this law, this law, this law, this law. Of course not, that's not how you received it. I worry for you, he said, that having believed you're going back.

And they were on the brink of going back because of the Judaizing influence. Well, you can think about churches today, Protestant churches too, I'm afraid, that have the same influence on people. It's Christ plus for salvation. And Paul calls that another gospel, a different gospel, which is no gospel.

It's not good news, it's bad news, because it puts the onus on the person to do all these things, to tick all these boxes and add Christ on for salvation.

And Paul said, as did the other apostles, no way. It's not the way. But then too, you'll recall that a few months back there, we finished our study in 1 John and we were looking at the people we called the Gnostics, the Noetals, those who split the person into two parts in an unbiblical way.

[20 : 21] Okay, we know man is body and spirit. But they split man in an unbiblical way in this sense that they said, well, you know, you can have fellowship with God with your mind, but you can indulge yourself.

You can do what you want in your body. And you recall that John said, that's a lie. It's not true. Because the life of the believer is a life that has to have moral fiber, it has to have the quality that is there in the word of God.

Bodily appetites are not to be indulged. We were reading there in Romans 6, how can we have been made alive in Christ, live any longer in sin?

Oh yeah, we may fall. I'm not saying we don't fall, but it is a fall and not a way of life anymore.

That's the point. But the Gnostics tried to have it both ways.

And John simply called that a liar, the person who did that a liar. Such people were rejecters of Christ and rejecters of his glorious person.

[21 : 49] Christ put Christ down.

One way or another, they put him down. And they all shared this. They were interested in themselves and in gain for themselves.

They didn't really care for the people to whom they spoke. you remember how the Lord Jesus Christ, when he was in John 10, he was talking about himself as a good shepherd.

Do you remember what he said? The hireling cares not for the sheep. Because he is a hireling. He said it for the many. And he doesn't worry if wolves come along and scatter the flock.

if other false teachers come along and try to grab a few for themselves, the hireling doesn't care. He's not worrying. He's not in it for the people, for the good of the people.

[22 : 59] Do you remember Paul had the same emphasis in that most affecting passage in the book of Acts, Acts 20, where he's met with the Ephesian elders down at Miletus, Acts 20, 29, and 30.

And he says, I know, he says, that savage wolves will come in among you, and also from among yourselves they will arise, not sparing the flock.

Oh, they had plenty to say. But note that built people up in the Lord Jesus in a way that was consistent with the word.

Not at all. Give them license. Let them follow us, and we'll make the most of it. That's what they were like. Not sparing the flock.

The same is true in Corinth in those early days, and in other churches in Asia Minor. where all manner of roving preachers come in, not to help and build up and strengthen the flock, but to take advantage and to lead it astray.

[24 : 24] And these folks weren't concerned with godly living, living according to the truth of the good news in Jesus. Now, my dear friends, sadly, little has changed.

The world over, it's true. Little has changed. People are going around in a brazen way, claiming to be, even claiming to be ministers of Jesus Christ.

And they're not, they're not teaching sound doctrine. They're despising it. They're telling us we've got to move on and adapt to the modern generation. don't get all fussed about morals and moral standing and right living.

I've said to you before that names that are used nowadays to designate certain lifestyles are a contradiction of the very words that are used.

Look at the real meaning of the word gay. The word of God doesn't mince the truth and let it blow on the wind.

[25 : 48] The word of God has something to say to us about what is right, yes, straight, and what is wrong. The word of God has something to say to us about what is being rooted and grounded in Jesus.

In the truth, holding fast sound words and there are those peddling their dangerous doctrines today who don't care for the flock, who care for their own position and their own prosperity.

May the Lord grant us discerning hearts, wise hearts. May the Lord grant the church in these days, the world over, the kind of strength it needs to stand firm for what is true in Christ.

Christ. There are people who are out there in the churches the world over, who are vulnerable, who rely on teachers, and there are false teachers who would not spare the flock, who live lives that are out of joint with the word of God.

God. And Paul says here, in reflecting on the difference that was made by the Holy Spirit's ministry through himself and Silas and Timothy, as you know what kind of men we were among you.

[27 : 28] Notice the last bit, for your sake. sake. For your sake. Secondly, and finally, recognize through gospel teachers, we have a duty before God, whether we like it or not, to recognize those sent by Christ because of their message, yes, but because of the difference that message makes to their lives.

And that's true of people the world over. People are, like it or not, I say, like it or not, they are under God in a solemn position to recognize what is true.

You know, he says, what kind of men we were among you for your sake. You know we were men of the Holy Spirit. You know we were men who were obedient to Christ.

I've heard people say, Christians say, oh, I like so and so because he's sincere. My dear friends, sincerity is not a criterion for someone who is Christ.

A person can be sincere and be sincerely wrong. wrong. I've met many a JW, very sincere, but sincerely wrong, who deny to Christ his essential godhood, who deny to Christ the death he died, the nature of the death he died, as an atonement, as a covering for our sin, as a death that bore the wrath of god, and exhausted it for all who believe, who took that body in which he died and raised it, a glorious resurrection, not spirit, but body.

[29 : 51] Sincerity is not enough. It is not a safe criterion to judge a professed preacher of the gospel.

And the problem, you see, then, as it is now, that people can come very sincere, they can convey a sincerity to us, but they may be holy and scrupulous in their aims.

They want to take advantage. And it is therefore of deep significance to us, and we should lay it to heart that Paul can say of himself, and Silas, and Timothy, when they went to Thessalonica, you knew what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

The proof of our genuineness was not sincerity. The proof of our genuineness was easy to see our lives were different because we were people of the Spirit of God.

We had a concern for a moral fibre. We had a concern for carefulness in our lives. We were saved by grace freely and to that.

[31 : 11] Now, some people have said, Paul is boasting here. He's being arrogant. There's an air of pomposity in the words.

He's got an over inflated ego to say, you knew what kind of men we were among you for your sake. No, rather, he was absolutely genuine.

There was, if you like, a moral and intellectual robustness in what he was saying, there was a practical honesty in what he was saying, you knew it, you saw us.

Paul himself functioned, as did Silas and Timothy, as ever under the great taskmaster's eye, as under the eye of omniscience.

O God, thou seest me. That's the way they functioned. And that's the way the preacher of the world is to functioned, as indeed is a Christian. You see me, O God, 24-7.

[32 : 22] And that's why Paul could say what he says here, you knew what manner of men we were among you for your sake. There is a healthy spiritual and moral guilelessness here, a transparency, we were open to scrutiny.

You saw us as we were. That's the same apostle, and you'll find the reference in Romans chapter 9.

He says this as he thinks about his own people. I tell you the truth in Christ, I do not lie, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart for my people.

There was this genuine honesty of statement. His heartfelt concern for his fellow Israelites. He talks to the Corinthians, interestingly, because there were many false apostles in Corinth.

He talks to them about the quality of his life. He said, I came among you. He said, I didn't insist on getting the most out of you.

[33 : 50] I knew I could. I could ask. I could name my price, but I didn't do that. I was ready to let it go for the sake of the message.

Peter, as well, says something similar in his first letter in chapter 5. He warns those who would preach the gospel not to do it for many.

That is to say, not to be obsessed with terms and conditions. but to do the work for genuine reasons and not to abuse one's power.

And you see, the point that Paul makes here has reference to the genuine quality of Christian conduct, and my dear friends, that applies to us all.

It's not just to the preachers, but to us all. And whilst we need to be discerning about true and false doctrine, and we certainly do, we also need to be discerning about what is real quality Christian living.

[35 : 09] And it may be, and I think it is true, it may be we have to admit we come short here. we, if we're honest with ourselves, we're not all we ought to be.

We have to say with a psalm writer at times, iniquities seem to prevail against me. Yes, I do sin.

Yes, my manner of life needs to improve.

We ought all to be able to say that. But blessed be God. when I do sin, I have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the helasmus, the propitiation for our sins.

We're back to basics. And the more seriously we regard the need for a transformed and ongoing transformation in our lives, the more we will want to be seeking the Lord for pardon and cleansing and renewal in the way that our manner of life may become our profession of Christ.

Yes, with Paul we can learn to say, I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

[36 : 46] O Lord, grant that preacher and hearer alike may receive the doctrines of the good news in Jesus and live by those doctrines to the praise of the glory of your grace.

Amen.