

Confidence and Joy in the Power of God's Word!

1 Thessalonians 2

Carl Laferton writes (thinking particularly of v17-20):” *Here is a wonderful motivation to minister to those around us in evangelism and encouragement, and to pray for those we are parted from*”

Imagine having been involved in a 3-week outreach event. It seems to be going well – a large number of people have been converted and you’ve spent time helping them understand and grow in their new-found faith. But public opposition to these gospel activities flares up, some of you are attacked physically and your group has to leave for your own safety...

- How might you feel about the success of your event? What would your concerns be for those who professed faith? If you were one of those new believers left behind, how might you feel... about the message you’d just heard, having just turned your back on everything you’d previously lived for, and about those who’d shared it with you and had now left you so suddenly?

These were questions Paul and the new Thessalonian believers may well have been facing and which Paul addresses in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. That’s because the events above were exactly the circumstances in which the new church in Thessalonica had been born – See Acts 17: 1-9, 13-15 for details – following the gospel ministry of Paul and Silas.

Paul writes out of great concern and love for the Thessalonian church, from whom he has been so painfully “torn away” v17, and “intense longing”v17 to see them face-to-face again. How we can relate to these feelings for our own fellowship at Carey! The reasons for our separation are different but there is so much to encourage us in our continuing ministry to one another and in making the most of gospel opportunities, despite apparent limitations.

Confidence and Joy in the Power of God's Word

Paul begins the letter in chapter 1 with clear delight in the spiritual progress of the new Thessalonian believers – see v8.

He is thankful and prayerful as he remembers the clear evidence of their conversion in their godly and fruitful lives v2-3. He is confident they’re truly “loved” and “chosen” by God v4 because of the way they were convicted by the power of Holy Spirit of the truth of the gospel v5 and accepted it gladly in spite of severe persecution v6. The dramatic change in their lives as they turned from their old life of idol-worship to the “true and living God” and looked forward to Jesus return v9-10 had become widely known.

In chapter 2 he wants to alleviate any possible doubts about his motives in his ministry amongst them, about his genuine love for them and the success of what might have seemed a disastrous visit! Here we learn what it is to be a true servant of Gods’ Word.

1. Paul's Priority

- Paul is not motivated by self-gain, financially or in terms of his reputation – 3-6. V4 assures us he and Silas were acting God’s behalf “not trying to please men but God”.

- So he was willing to be bold and took risks in sharing the gospel, despite opposition v2
- His goal was their spiritual growth, “urging you to live lives worthy of God” v12
- He considered their progress in the gospel to be of eternal worth and would be his “hope” “joy” “glory” and “crown” when Christ returns v19!

2. Godly concern and love

Despite traumatic experiences of great personal danger and opposition, Paul continued to think of the Thessalonians - reminding them of his love for them, that remains even while apart. He hasn't forgotten them and still has genuine concern for them. He reminds them of how he had cared for (and still cares for) them while with them...

- He cared for them like a “gentle” mother, whose children are so “dear” to her v7, nurturing and protecting them, in the face of danger.
- He was humble and willingly generous with his time and made sacrifices so as not to be a financial “burden” v8-9
- He was a godly example in behaviour v10.
- He was like a father training his children in different ways, “encouraging, comforting and urging” them in spiritual progress appropriate to those who belong to God's kingdom v12.
- He prayed continually and with gratitude for them v13.
- He longed to have fellowship with them again, constantly thinking about them v17

3. Confidence that God's Word is powerful!

His time with them had not been a disaster as some might fear. God was and is still at work in them!

- Paul trusted that the message of salvation is effective because it's “not ... the word of men, but... the word of God” v13. It wasn't compromised by the persecution and trouble that ensued. God can work through his Word despite unpromising circumstances.
- Paul recognised that God's Word is “at work” changing, and continues to change, the lives of those who put their trust in it v13.
- The power of God's Word is proved in suffering v14. The visible outworking of the Thessalonians' conversion was shown as they persevered under hardship.

Thinking it all through in practice for us...

1. How can the current pandemic and associated restrictions cause us to be too self-focussed in our thoughts, behaviour and prayers?
 - What challenges you in particular about Paul's ministry to this new church, given his own personal trials?

- Is there a particular way in which you can show love to a fellow-believer at the moment – which would be most appropriate from Paul's example in these?

- 2. How does the response of the Thessalonians described in v3 encourage you...**
- as you pray for the various ways in which Carey is currently able to reach out with the good news of Jesus?**
 - to change the way you speak about God to others, today? Do you need greater boldness? Take more risks?**

Who can you “dare” to speak to about Jesus today? Ask others to pray for those on your heart.

These recent months have been an opportunity to re-consider our priorities, to reflect on those things we have been living for and now seem much less important than they once did. 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 helps us re-set those priorities and consider what is worth investing our lives in – investments that will bring lasting spiritual fruit in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

Let's pray for each other and for us as a church we seek to reach out with the gospel and that many would *“welcome the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit” 1 Thess 1v6*

“... one day we will stand in Jesus' presence and enjoy and revel in being able to see those we helped bring to faith, or those we helped continue in faith. That will matter far more than what career we had, or possessions we owned, or popularity we enjoyed. Here is a wonderful motivation to minister to those around us in evangelism and encouragement, and to pray for those who we are parted from” Carl Laferton