

“Street Cred”

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- 1 Thess 1:6 – 2:6 -

6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. 8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. 9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and 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, [even] Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (2) 1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. 3 For our exhortation [did] not [come] from error or uncleanness, nor [was it] in deceit. 4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God [is] witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

1:6-7

Having actually seen God powerfully manifested in and through the apostle Paul, the people **followed** Paul to God. A lot of Bible versions use the word “imitators.” The people sought to live out and serve God like Paul and His entourage because they wanted whatever it was they saw in Paul. In many different ways he was clearly a guy with some street cred. However, Paul wasn’t arrogant in this matter: He simply knew where he stood with Christ, as well as his responsibility to be an example to those he ministered to.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:1 “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*” It wasn’t just Paul the preacher that drew people to Jesus; it was Paul the servant, Paul the disciple, and Paul-the-hand-of-God. I wonder how often will seek to lead people with just our words and not our lives? Words are cheap. But “*The gospel is the power of God at work in the human heart. The gospel is the power of God operating, working, stirring, convicting, and energizing a person to believe in and live out Christ.*” (The Preachers Outline sermon Bible and Commentary.)

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

Knowing that gospel power as a reality in our lives, suddenly there is a camaraderie of fellowship and brotherhood with those who have gone before us. We **understand**. Like God telling Jeremiah, "Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" (Jer 23:29) Ah yes, Lord...indeed it is! Being a believer and a follower in that day was not an easy path. There was constant persecution and trials because of it. But those who chose to walk that road were not doing so to find a life elixir or a balm to sooth the wounds of life. They did so because it was true. Because it was a fact. Because it was



real. They saw the reality of it in the powerful life that transformed Saul the killer and Christian persecutor, to Paul the apostle, the servant of God. This was no ‘card trick’...no ‘slight-of-hand.’ It was real and they saw it for themselves. Out on then street, in the real world...where the “rubber meets the road.” This was no “Sunday-go-to-meeting” faith where we put on a carefully crafted spiritual cloak for Sunday church and then live like everyone else throughout the week.

Despite the extreme hardships they lived in, there was still fruit from their ministry and their lives in general. People still received Christ and lives were changed even through and despite of the persecution. There was also a very real reward that accompanied that kind of life: a joy in their lives that stood out amongst a world that even then was striving to find the same, albeit they were looking in the same old places that had been proven repeatedly to be empty. Those who found that place then in turn became examples to all those around them, and it all repeated itself.

2 Corinthians 4:13 “And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak..."

We should note here too that the church in Thessalonica was the only church Paul ever called an “example.” To Paul, this church was the pattern for what churches ought to be both in spiritual growth and ministry. What was their example? Verse 3 says they had a work of faith, a labor of love and a steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, and through it all they manifested joy despite hardship and tribulation. The word “example” here means “imprint.” The church in Thessalonica became the very “imprint “of Jesus Christ and His gospel!

1:8-10

The members of this church were so committed to the Lord that their testimony spread all over the world. Imagine such a record being left concerning us and this church? The NLT renders this passage as “...and now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, ... for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don’t need to tell them about it, for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God.” The people on the street knew about this church. They may have liked them or hated them, but they knew where they stood. Their reputation preceded them.

The phrase “sounded forth” is where we get our word “echo.” They received the gospel themselves and “sent it back out.” The gospel is to never stop. It’s a living thing. We are to receive it, and in its supernatural change of us, we give it back in word, deed, and lifestyle.

Notice that they didn’t try to clean up their lives by themselves. It doesn’t work that way, no matter how much we might try. And how often we do try! They didn’t try to *change themselves* by turning away from idols and then turning to God. They turned to God first, then with God’s help and strength, they repented and turned away from idols.

The believers left their idols, and “turned” to Christ. This is a classic case of “repentance.” For there must be a “turning” in our lives, because we are naturally on a wrong road, and we have to get off it. Again, this is not merely an intellectual turn...a philosophical change, but moreover a shift in how we live out and how we react to what comes at us.

When these folks did “turn,” they went on to “serve.” That word in its original form literally means “to be a slave.” For many of us, the “line in the sand” is made right there. That’s where we stop. That’s our limit. We want God and we want redemption and eternal life, but we won’t be anyone’s slave...even God almighty. It’s

strange how we so readily accept the work of the cross to save us, and then spend our lives constantly battling God for everything that we think is ours. But it's not. None of it is. And there is definitely one individual that I do not want to be a slave of, and that's me. Because no one has misled me or hurt me more than me. But reality is, we will be controlled by something or someone. Our only real choice is to who or what. Me? I'm going with the one who created me because I recognize His power, His authority, and His profound love for me...so I'm going with Him.

You know, once you come to terms with the fact that everything... *everything*, is His, and anything that He lets us have is a gift of His grace, there is no longer a battle within us. For it is replaced with a heart of thanks and a life clarity that cannot be found anywhere else. Suddenly decisions in life become so much easier to make, when one starts from the position that God is first in everything we do, everything we have and live out. Because they know that if God is first in every decision, they are always safe and on firm ground.

That's where that peace comes in. Believers who understand this and practice such, are the ones who truly experience that peace in their lives. Not just in a philosophical ideal or a Christian "byline." More than language of Christian ease. Strong concordance of the bible's original languages includes the following in its definition of peace: "the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is."

"...and to wait for His Son from heaven..."

The word "wait" means more than just wait like we use it today; it involves patience and trust. And it emphasizes "an expectant and active attempt to live for His glory in the meantime." I wonder. Does that sound like us? Are we really waiting for Christ? Or are we just about our own business figuring His return is just some sort of inevitability? In the Greek language, the word is used to describe what a mother does when she is anticipating the birth of her baby. She readies the nursery and eagerly prepares for his arrival.

Chapter 2

2:1-2

Paul's "street cred" was not always kudos and praise. NO...his reputation was that he was a man of great love and grace but he did not suffer fools gladly and at times was known to throw down on those who were endangering the true followers of Christ. There always seemed to be those who were slanderously attacking Paul's credibility. It goes with the territory, both then and now. The bigger you get, the more detractors seem to surface. No pastor gets too far without developing some thick skin. I saw a modern website that was suggesting the reason Paul had negative things to say about homosexuality was because he was no doubt struggling with his own homosexual tendencies. So I guess it never lets up...even 2000 years after a guy is dead!

Paul wasn't as concerned about how these lies affected him personally, as he was concerned about how such talk affected them.

Pastor's...well, they grow to kind of expect the backlash. But the flock doesn't always understand. They are generally more trusting and not nearly as cynical as pastors. We're sort of like cops...hard to keep from being suspicious as we both tend to see the worst of humanity. And yet, Paul was unwilling to "throw in the towel." He was unwilling to back off. No doubt if he had, things would have went a lot easier on him. The temptation is always to just lighten up a bit on the message...you know, maybe not so direct...not so bluntly honest, you know? Not lie, just avoid the controversial stuff...the cultural "hot points."

Someone once told me “you worry about your character, and let God worry about your reputation.” It doesn’t do any good to stress out over these things, nor does fighting back seem to be an effectual time use either. It’s just the way things are...for Paul, for me, and for thousands of other men who serve God every day.

The missionary martyr Jim Elliot wrote in his journal:

“In spiritual work, if nowhere else, the character of the worker decides the quality of his work. Shelley and Byron may be moral free-lancers and still write good poetry. Wagner may be lecherous and still produce fine music, but it cannot be so in any work for God. Paul could refer to his own character and manner of living for proof of what he was saying to the Thessalonians. Nine times over in this first epistle he says, “You know,” referring to the Thessalonians’ firsthand observation of Paul’s private as well as public life. Paul went to Thessalonica and lived a life that more than illustrated what he preached; it went beyond illustration to convincing proof. No wonder so much work in the Kingdom is shoddy; look at the moral character of the worker.”

But no matter what heat he had to endure, Paul knew that in the end he had won. Because no matter what the slanderers have said about him, he had the produce...he had the results. For the believers in Thessalonica...*as well as elsewhere...* were his proof and fruit of victory. They could say what they wanted, but he had the goods. They had come to Christ, and had committed their lives to the advancement of His kingdom. The church had been established. Thus Paul was able to step up and say “For you yourselves know brethren...” The liars could say what they wanted, but the church knew the truth. Not because of what Paul had *said*, but because of what His *life had said*...

So play on troublemakers.... Vernon McGee puts it this way...*When he (Paul) came to Thessalonica, it rocked a great many folk, bringing many to a saving knowledge of Christ. And it brought a church into existence. Paul was not simply talking about a theory or a philosophy, but about something that worked in Thessalonica. The gospel walked down the streets of that city, and it got into the hearts and homes and lives of men and women.*

John MacArthur who himself has experienced much opposition reminds us that, *“In the ministry, there is always pressure to mitigate the message, to be inoffensive to sinners, to make the gospel acceptable to them. But such a compromise had no place in Paul’s strategy. Instead, he had full confidence in God’s power to overcome all opposition and achieve His redemptive purpose. The servant of God preaches the true, unmitigated message God has laid out in His Word, not some other message. He does so for the sake of truth, not for personal popularity. And when opposition comes, he trusts in the power of God and stays obedient to his calling. All that was true of Paul and his companions. As with all dedicated preachers of the gospel, they counted the cost of faithfully confronting sinners with the truth and rested boldly in the sovereign, supreme power of God.”*

2:3-6

The New Living Testament renders this passage as follows:

“So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery. For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts. Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money! As for human praise, we have never sought it from you or anyone else.”

Paul dealt with the specifics. He wasn’t shy about speaking openly, honestly, and forthright. It was who he was. It was part of his street cred. Perhaps that’s because he didn’t have anything to hide.

There were whispers...back alley gossip that the gospel he preached was based on error. That Christianity encouraged sexual immorality. That his methods were underhanded and for selfish material gain. If the people had just stopped and thought about it, they would realize that Paul was clearly innocent of these charges and had the proof of such. But it is always easier to believe the dirty laundry than it is to reject it. Men have always seemed to prefer to believe the worst about each other rather than the best. No doubt in a child like attempt to exalt themselves up in comparison!

It is always going to be easier to soft-peddle sin, avoid confrontation and play easy with the false doctrines and wolves that try to come in amongst us. But for me, I always find myself coming back to how Jesus himself lived and ministered, and how he dealt with “snakes” when they attempted to get to the flock. For Paul, the call to minister...the call to preach, was a sacred stewardship. He knew that in the end, he had to please God, not men. He wasn't selling something. He was giving it away. But it wasn't cheap. It cost Jesus His life upon a cross. And it's supposed to cost us everything...

But your “payment” wasn't made to Paul, and it isn't made to me as your pastor. It's made to God. And remember, it's all His anyway.

You are merely acknowledging and thus living forth the truth of the matter.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Maybe we should ask ourselves: who are we trying to please today? Who rules the day? Our family? Our husband? Our wife? We're quick to answer “God.” But is that a fact? Where exactly does the ‘buck stop’ for you? For Paul, he made his decision based on Christ and scripture, and there was no turning back. And so few remain today with that heart...

I have learned a long time ago, just what Paul speaks of here. While I appreciate your support and your blessing, at the end of the day, I do what I do for the same reason that I hope that you do what you do. That bottom line is that I answer to Jesus. There is none so gracious, ...*and none so demanding.*