

Introduction: We marveled in recent weeks to behold the power of the Word of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit to bring a new heart and saving faith to a person like Rahab – sunk in the depths of immorality, paganism and idolatry. We also have rejoiced at the patient ministry of the Word by which Jesus restored His disciples in Jerusalem after rising from the dead. The Apostle Paul celebrates the same power of God’s Word in the lives of the Gentile Thessalonians. So, we turn for two weeks of notes to this early New Testament letter of the Apostle Paul to celebrate the power of the Word of God in yet another corner of this benighted world.

Monday: read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 & 5-6; 2:1,5 & 8-11. “You know! You remember! You heard!” All these ‘reminder-verbs’ Paul uses to list for the Thessalonians the many spiritual blessings God had showered upon them. Paul’s goal is to overwhelm the Thessalonians with a sense of their privileges in order that they might be “lost in wonder, love and praise” - instead of lost in the pain of their afflictions. Consider how Paul reminds them of the blessings they experienced both through the preached Word of the Apostles and the Gospel they proclaimed:

- “Remember your work of faith; labor of love and endurance inspired by hope” (1:3).
- “Remember the example of godly living which you saw in our lives as God’s messengers” (1:5).
- “Remember the joy you felt when the message was preached to you” (1:6).
- “Remember how willing we were to suffer in order to bring the Gospel from Philippi to you” (2:2).
- “Remember how we gave you not just the gospel, but our very selves” (2:8).
- “Remember how we toiled night and day, living blamelessly among you, like a father with his children” (2:9-11).

In all these ways, Paul, Silas and Timothy commended the Gospel of God to the Thessalonians: by deeds as well as words of integrity and holiness! Think how stabilizing it was for this young church to know that God had done a quality work of holiness in the message-bearers of the Gospel. The Thessalonians could be sure that God was in earnest in *their* lives by seeing God’s earnest work in their *leaders, Paul, Silas and Timothy!*

Meditate and Pray: Let us recognize and thank God for the vital role which integrity plays in an apostle, pastor or evangelist’s effectiveness. Ask the Lord to raise up leaders in your church who will “adorn the Gospel” they preach by the holy lives they live.

Tuesday: read 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12. Paul consistently sought to exonerate his labors in the Word of God from all the accusations which came his way, including accusations of wrongdoing, dishonesty, deception and malfeasance. For proof that such accusations did indeed come his way, see 1 Thess. 2:3-6. Such accusations are indeed poison for any long-term Gospel endeavor. Paul knew how damaging it was for Christian workers to live unholy lives, and so declares what was true of his life, and what must be true of ours also: “See,” Paul says in 1 Thess. 2:10, “...how holy, righteous & blameless we were.” Such integrity is crucial, as John Murray reminds us in his article entitled “Adorning the Gospel” (chap. 25 in vol. 1 of his works), which we will use as our Meditation and Prayer of response for today:

*Nothing is more prejudicial to the adornment of the Gospel and the manward expression of faith than to be **long** on profession and **short** on integrity. What contradiction! What occasion given to the adversary to speak reproachfully and to blaspheme, if profession is not complemented by the basic elements of morality. Dishonesty, untruth, impurity, grasping, greed, intemperance, loose talk, gossip, slander, irreverent use of the name of God, sacrilegious and salacious humor – they all make profession a travesty of Christian witness. God save us from such a contradictory life. Must we not say “Amen” to such a challenge?*

Wednesday/Thursday: read 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12. We gave thanks yesterday for the *integrity* of Gospel ministry which the Thessalonian church enjoyed. But now we come to face a basic reality which makes us long for something *more memorable* to inspire us than the integrity and suffering of our Christian leaders and fellow believers who have gone before us. Why is *something more* needed? Because not even sitting under the Apostle himself in his godly ministry to the church is enough to make us thankful, secure and productive Christians. As John Murray admits of all Gospel workers, including the Apostles: *How far short we come of adorning the Gospel! I am convinced that piety is a rare plant. Formal profession is common but piety in the sense of godliness is not.*

How then are we to be humbly hopeful that our inconsistencies will not in the end defeat the purpose of the Word of God in those under our care in that Word’s teaching and preaching? Who is the One who can burn Himself lovingly into our memories and constrain us by His love to holy living? The answer is given today in 2 Cor. 5:14. It is the “love of Christ” in 2 Cor. 5:14 which compels and reminds us how and why we live for God. Christ’s love, of course, is chiefly and most powerfully seen in Christ’s suffering and death upon the Cross. How we need the power of the Cross to invade our forgetfulness!

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for His Son, our suffering Savior, whose Cross work *never fails in the end* to bring our minds back to our Christian blessings and duty. Behold the price Jesus Christ paid in His office as our Redeemer. Never forget the ransom of His blood shed by which He sets us free from sin, guilt and Satan! Let us acknowledge now that the Cross has a power which no amount of mere human persuasion or argument has to produce within us grateful, godly living. Use the words of hymn # 251 from our Trinity Hymnal:

*Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand,
The shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land;
A home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way,
From the burning of the noontide heat, and the burden of the day.*

*Upon that cross of Jesus mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One Who suffered there for me;
And from my stricken heart with tears two wonders I confess;
The wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness.*

*I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of His face;*

*Content to let the world go by to know no gain or loss,
My sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross.*

Friday: read 1 Thessalonians 2:10-15 and 1 Corinthians 2:1-2. While we humbly confess (to our shame) that we are often *unmoved* by the blessings given to us through the Word, and even *unmoved* by the exemplary lives of the Gospel workers who bring that Word to us, we end this week's notes by celebrating the *effective power of the Word of the Cross* to move us when mere human persuasion or example fails. This is why Paul specifically gives thanks in 1 Thess. 2:13 that the Gospel Word came to the Thessalonians not as mere human words, but as the very Word God, which continues to work in them as believers! Furthermore, we know that God's Word in 1 Thess. 2:13 is a reference to the preaching of the Cross because in 1 Thess. 3:2 Paul identifies the "Word which they have spreading" as the "Gospel of Christ" – a "Gospel" which always begins with the power of the Cross, as 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 makes clear. Only the Word of the Cross can do this – invade our hearts, quicken our memories, and cut us to the heart with the conviction that leads to repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Meditate and Pray: Let us give thanks for the power of the preached Word of the Cross and ask God to make that Cross our boast and glory. May the Lord help us never to be ashamed of that Cross, using the words of hymn # 610:

*"Take up thy cross," the Savior said,
"If thou wouldst My disciple be;
Deny thyself, the world forsake,
And humbly follow after Me."*

*Take up thy cross, let not its weight
Fill thy weak spirit with alarm;
His strength shall bear thy spirit up,
And brace thy heart and nerve thine arm.*

*Take up thy cross, nor heed the shame,
Nor let thy foolish pride rebel;
Thy Lord for thee the cross endured,
And saved thy soul from death and hell.*

*Take up thy cross then in His strength,
And calmly sin's wild deluge brave,
'Twill guide thee to a better home,
It points to glory o'er the grave.*