



Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

With Full Conviction

There is no doubt that the apostle Paul believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Early in the history of the church, he — then known as Saul of Tarsus — was instrumental in the death of the first martyr of the faith, Stephen. From that point on he persecuted the church intensely, being firmly convinced that their belief that Jesus was raised from the dead was a hoax or contrivance of confused men and women. But Saul was soon to reckon with the Christ who he had believed was permanently dead and buried. On his way to Damascus to round up disciples of Christ and bring them to Jerusalem for trial and punishment, Saul encountered the Lord Jesus. Blinded and knocked to the ground, he could only ask, “Who are you, lord?” when spoken to. “I am Jesus the Nazarene,” the voice responded, “whom you are persecuting” (Acts 22:8). That answer rocked his entire belief system; Jesus was clearly raised from the dead, and in a position of demonstrated power. “But arise, and stand on your feet,” was the command in the continuing conversation. “For this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you” (Acts 26:16). Jesus not only appeared to Paul that one time on the Damascus road, but also many times following. There is no doubt that the apostle Paul believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

- **In Thessalonica** — Thus, when Paul came to Thessalonica, he brought with him that full assurance that Jesus was indeed risen. “Our gospel,” he comments, “did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit *and with full conviction*” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). When a man is fully convinced about something, there is a force of character about him that communicates in all the non-verbals. For someone like Paul, who already many times over essentially had been faced with a choice — death, or deny Christ — the force of his conviction that Jesus was raised from the dead filled the area around his presence like an amplifier system filling a room with sound. The Thessalonian brethren would be able to remember when he arrived in the town, his impact on the synagogue, and the impression he made on the Gentiles.
- **What kind of men** — It is one thing to say all the right things, it is another to back those fine sounding words with appropriate action. After referring to the coming of the gospel to Thessalonica, the apostle then adds, “just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you.” The conduct of Paul and his preaching companions was so clearly consistent with the principles and practices of Christianity that he could say that the brethren “knew” about their character. Furthermore, their exhibition of character had shone brightly in the face of some severe testing and persecution; Paul used the words, “proved among you.”

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Conviction not only gives the words of the gospel a resonance that those without conviction can never achieve, but it drives the one with said conviction onward. A sense of this driving conviction can be gleaned from some of the statements of the apostle to the church in Corinth: “For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake,” he adverted, “that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” Having laid the groundwork for his next driving comment, he wrote, “But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke,’ we also believe, therefore also we speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus” (2 Corinthians 4:11-14). That is the conviction that drove him onward!

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