



Remembering the Beginning

Paul arrived in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, having come into town from Philippi. While Paul was preaching in the place for prayer outside of Philippi, a slave girl having a spirit of divination kept following Paul and his fellow workers. Being demon-possessed, she was kind of like a crazy person, and day after day she was saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). Paul was annoyed by the testimony coming from this source, so at one point he cast the evil spirit out of the slave girl. With the spirit cast out, the girl did not have any ability to predict the future with the extra accuracy attributed to someone demon-possessed, so her masters lost their source of profit from her. The result was that Paul and Silas were cast into prison and beaten severely. God caused an earthquake to shake the prison, the Philippian jailer heard the gospel and was immersed, and Paul and Silas were asked to leave town by the judges. To Thessalonica they went, since it was the next locality with a Jewish synagogue.

- ◆ **How it was** — The apostle, then, takes a little trip down memory lane. "For you yourselves know, brethren," he recalls, "that our coming to you was not in vain, but after we had already suffered and been mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition" (1 Thessalonians 2:1,2). Having faced much persecution in his preaching of the gospel, he remembered once again that he and his companions "had the boldness in our God" to preach the one way of salvation through Jesus Christ. As he reasoned in the synagogue at Thessalonica, the Jews were jealous and did everything they could to oppose the gospel, finally forcing Paul and Silas out of town and down the road to Berea. "Amid much opposition," he quietly notes.
- ◆ **Purity of exhortation** — The entire communication of God to men is predicated on truth, and in fact is truth. Satan, on the other hand, is a liar and the source of lies. Thus it would be clear that if the gospel of God were truly preached, it would be preached openly and without subterfuge. "For our exhortation," clarifies the apostle, "does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit" (1 Thessalonians 2:3). By obvious contrast, those who preach falsely are in error, or attempt to justify impurity, or are just plain deceptive.
- ◆ **Entrusted with the gospel** — The gospel, then, must be carried by those who are honest and exhibit the character of Christ—especially the apostles. The exhortation (an interesting word for *preaching*) came openly and honestly, "just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts" (1 Thessalonians 2:4). The pressure to bend, twist, or distort the gospel is tremendous. In Paul's case (and certainly the other apostles also), the opposition by the Jews nearly everywhere he went was intense, both in verbal argument and in violent persecution. If at any point there was a desire to please men, there would have been compromise on his part. That is why Jesus took such care in the selection of the apostles, and allowed the weeding out process to go on that eliminated Judas Iscariot. These men were those who could stand the test. But the pressure from the Jewish element was so strong that at one point even the apostle Peter got carried into the hypocrisy of not eating with the Gentile Christians. The gospel has to be preached regardless of opposition.

The God who examined the hearts of Paul and those other first century purveyors of the gospel also examines the hearts of modern Christians. Paul passed the test; he was approved by God and was thus entrusted with the sound doctrine of the new covenant. The question is: can any of twenty-first century Christians pass that same test, preaching and teaching the gospel of God without compromise, speaking the truth in love?

The God who examined their hearts examines the hearts of today.