



The Second Coming
of Christ

Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

The Proving Ground

The Father expects His children of faith to exhibit the character befitting those making a claim to godliness. "And do not be conformed to this world," was the exordium to the brethren in Rome, "but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may *prove* what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). *Proving* basically has to do with passing some sort of test. "You have been distressed by various trials," commented the apostle Peter, "that the *proof* of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though *tested* by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6,7).

Before Jesus sent the apostles out with the message of salvation beginning in Acts chapter two, He put them through the tests to prove that they were trustworthy. The Lord knew that the character of Saul of Tarsus, once he turned to the Lord, would similarly shine as he would pass through tremendous pressure and persecution without compromising the gospel.

▼ **No pretex**ts — Because the gospel is rooted in "the word of truth," there can be no lying or hidden agendas connected with its proclamation and explanation. "For we never came with flattering speech, as you know," Paul recalls, "nor with a pretext for greed — God is witness ..." (1 Thessalonians 2:5). If someone is flattering people, then he is planning on using them for personal gain somehow; and this is not honest. The apostle and his co-laborers did not come to Thessalonica to engage in a money extracting process or shakedown; they came to press the claims of Jesus Christ upon the Thessalonians' souls. Had greed been their motive, they would have figured out how to avoid the intense suffering that came upon them in that portion of Macedonia. Thus it was clear that there were no pretex

▼ **No glory** — The apostle was willing to call God as witness as to the purity of their motives and intentions. Since this epistle was written under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we know for certain the accuracy of Paul's claims. He is also emphatic, adding "nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or others" (1 Thessalonians 2:6). The desire for glory from men — peer pressure — is a very large factor in people's rejecting the slicing truth of the gospel. For example, "many of the rulers [of the synagogues in Jerusalem] believed in Him," the apostle John noted, "but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for *they loved the approval of men* rather than the approval of God" (John 12:42,43). Not only is there tremendous pressure on those who would think about believing the truth, but there is even more pressure on those who would think about proclaiming the truth, because the proclaimers are more visible. Paul and those who traveled with him did not back away from preaching the truth in order to be men-pleasers.

"As apostles of Christ," he adds, "we might have asserted our authority." However, seeking glory from men was not their motive, and Paul was not trying to elevate himself in some sick game. "But we proved to be gentle among you," he avers, "as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7). The congregation in Thessalonica consisted of new Christians who were willing to follow Christ in the midst of intense persecution from the local Jews. Not only would they have the normal personal issues to overcome as they spiritually moved forward from their past lives and habits, but these tensions would be exacerbated by the ill-treatment they were enduring. The leadership of Paul, *proving* to be the proper combination of care and correction, had been critical to their spiritual growth. The picture he used is one for modern leadership to keep in mind: "As a nursing mother tenderly cares for her children"!

**"WE PROVED
TO BE GENTLE
AMONG YOU."**

JAY WILSON