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Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

Imparting Their Lives

It cannot be overstressed that the gospel of Christ is carried from person to person. The growth of each Christian requires personal involvement on the part of church leadership in order to help the struggling saints move forward and upward. The scripture pictures sheep being led by shepherds, who know them by name and are personally involved. The great overarching picture is that of the Chief Shepherd, who is described in this foundational manner: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Even the great God, in dealing with the

sons of men, became one of us in order to have the personal touch, and share in the one-to-one interaction so necessary for the word of God to have its proper impact. Hence the apostle Paul and those traveling with him, when they came to Thessalonica, engaged in these same important personal interactions.

▲ **Fond affection** — As the apostle was writing this epistle, inspired by the Spirit of God, he comments on the personal relationship he had with these brethren. Because he had gotten down in the trenches with the people in the congregation, he could appeal to them personally because they knew who he was and how he had conducted himself. "We never came with flattering speech," he had stated. He was not motivated by greed, and did not seek earthly glory. "We proved to be gentle among you," was his assertion, "as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." "Having thus a fond affection for you," the apostle continues the thought, "we were pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8). So strong was this affection that it generated these words: *we were pleased!* What Paul and others were doing was not just a *cause* or some crusade or revolutionary agenda; they were driven by intense concern for those whom they had come to know personally. Thus it was not just the words of the gospel — which are powerful and life-giving — that he was presenting to the people, but they "imparted their own lives."

▲ **Labor and hardship** — He could go on appealing to their memories of his time with them. "For you recall, brethren," he prompts, "our labor and hardship, how working day and night so as not to be a burden to any one of you, as we proclaimed the gospel of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:9). There have always been those who use scripture as "a pretext for greed." The apostle was conscious of this, and in consequence his method of operation was to work if necessary and have those accompany him work to pay their own expenses. In this way it was clear that they did not come for money they could extract from the brethren, but that their concern truly was the eternity of each of those who heard. The words "labor and hardship" are easy to read over quickly, but each modern saint needs to create some vivid pictures in his mind as to what that would look like, and not complain about his circumstances.

▲ **Devoutly, uprightly, and blamelessly** — Amazingly, after listing all the things above, he could continue to appeal to what they personally knew about Paul and his team. "You are our witnesses," says he, "and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers" (1 Thessalonians 2:10). Again, these are simple but powerful words. The brethren saw the personal faith and prayers of the apostle in action. They knew his moral character, and his walk with the Lord.

The apostle is not writing this epistle simply because he could not think of anything else to do on a fine Saturday afternoon. He is penning these thoughts because of his continuing desire to help the brethren remain solid and secure in their faith, and to extend the influence of the gospel. So when he is ready to make his appeal to them, they know that he has no hidden agenda, but that his concern is solely for them and their eternities.

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