

The Old Paths Monthly

**“Ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein;
And ye shall find rest for your souls.” - Jeremiah 6:16**

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The Message Comes with Full Conviction

After Paul was mistreated in Philippi, he continued to answer the Macedonian call for help by boldly preaching in Thessalonica amid much opposition (1 Thess 2:1-2). Paul summed up the response of those who were converted to Christ is this way, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thess 1:5).

Paul’s summary is the key to understanding why the message changed these people in Thessalonica and why the message should change us today. True conversion to Jesus comes from accepting the gospel as a Divine message. Messages from men are mere words, but a message from the Holy Spirit works with Divine power to change men from the inside out.

A little later in Paul’s first letter to these converts, he expressed his thanksgiving

about their response to the message, “We also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thess 2:13). The foundation of their conversion to Christ and their continued service to Him was their belief that the message Paul spoke came from God.

How did Paul convince them that he was speaking for God? The answer to this will provide us with the basis to believe that the gospel is a Divine message.

How did they react once they believed Paul’s words were from God? Their example will show us how that our lives will be transformed by power of God once we, with full conviction, receive the gospel as the word of God...

The Source of Full Conviction

When Paul came to Thessalonica he followed his usual custom of preaching in the Jewish synagogue (Acts 17:2). There he could find people who were easier to speak to in regard to Jesus because they shared a common faith in the true God and the O.T. Scriptures. These common beliefs were then and are now stepping stones to belief in Jesus.

First of all, one must believe that there is a Divine Creator. Some do not believe this, but rather accept the theory of evolution. If this is the case with you, consider that logically “every house has a builder” (Heb 3:4) and that what has been made cries out to us concerning the power and glory of a Divine being (Rom 1:20; Ps 19:1-4).

And, some may believe in a Divine Creator, but they are not convinced He is the God of Israel, the author of the Old Testament. If this is the case with you, consider the predictions made in the O.T. that were far beyond the human mind to see- predictions that have clearly been fulfilled. The Nile River canals have dried up leaving 96% of Egypt as desert and the once powerful and rich nation has become a lowly kingdom (Eze 30:12; 29:14-15). Alexander the Great scraped the ruins of Tyre into the water to make a land bridge to defeat the Phoenicians and the fisherman now spread their nets on the bare rock where the city once stood (Eze 26:12-14). Babylon, once destroyed, has never been rebuilt, not even by Saddam Hussein who made a failed attempt (Isa 13:20). There are so many more fulfilled predictions that demonstrate without a doubt the Divine authorship of the O.T.!

Since Paul’s audience had a firm basis for Him to talk with them about Jesus he proceeded to reason with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ (King) who the prophets predicted to come had to suffer and rise again from the dead. Jesus had done so. Therefore, He is the King that the prophets foretold. Some Jews and a large number of God-fearing Greeks were persuaded by the evidence and joined Paul and Silas as Christians (Acts 17:1-4).

If you told me to pick up your uncle (whom I had never met) at the Indianapolis airport, do you think I could spot him if you told me that he was short, thin, had red hair, a mus-tache, wore glasses, would be dressed in a black suit with a teal shirt and a black tie, and would be carrying a briefcase? Of course, I could walk right up and shake his hand and direct him to my car!

If God told you that the King would be preceded by a messenger (Mal 3:1), would be born in Bethlehem of a virgin (Mic 5:2; Isa 7:14), would come from the human line of Abraham and David (Gen 12:3; 2 Sam 7:12-13), but would be Divine (Isa 7:14) and do miracles to prove it (Is 35:5-6), would be humble and peaceful (Isa 42:1-4), would suffer rejection as a sacrifice for man’s sins (Isa 53:1-6), but afterward would be resurrected (Isa 53:10-11) and exalted for His service to God and mankind (Isa 53:12); could you not compare this description with the life of Jesus as recorded in the N.T. and easily identify Jesus as the King? Based on such evidence, you, as the Thessalonians, could come to full conviction about Jesus...

The Result of Full Conviction

The full conviction of the Thessalonians about the identity of Jesus brought dramatic changes to their lives. They did not just believe that Jesus is King; they lived like it. The powerful word of God that brought them to conversion to Jesus continued its work in them (1 Thess 2:13).

Paul gives a summary of what full conviction about Jesus did in the lives of the Thessalonians as he opens his letter with thanksgiving for their “work of faith and labor of love, and steadfastness of hope” (1 Thess 1:2-3). Motivated by their faith in Jesus and their love for Jesus, they were doing the good works that Christians are created to do (Eph 2:10). And, their service to the Lord was steadfast, day by day, come what may, as they kept their hope of heaven before them.

Full conviction about Jesus gave the Thessalonians a faith that stood the test of persecution. Paul was only able to preach in Thessalonica for three Sabbaths due to the intense opposition of the Jews. Paul and Silas had to flee the city in the night (Acts 17:5-10). The persecution that came on the preachers then came down on the new converts. After Paul left them, he could not stand it as he wondered about their new-found faith. He sent Timothy to Thessalonica to find out if their faith had survived Satan’s assault or if he had won and their teaching work had been in vain. He came back with good news that they stood firm in the Lord, despite it all (1 Thess 3:1-8).

Full conviction about Jesus inspired a faith that had to be shared, no matter the cost.

The Thessalonians kept the faith, but they did not keep it to themselves. They sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in their city, but throughout Greece. Persecution could not stop them from speaking what they were fully convicted of. They like Paul had the attitude, “We also believe, therefore we speak” (2 Cor 4:13). And, in teaching despite persecution, they became imitators of the Lord and those who had taught them (1 Thess 1:6-8).

Full conviction about Jesus produced a change that was obvious to all. From the information we find in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians, we know that the gospel was received not only by Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, but by pagan Gentiles as well. There were those in Thessalonica who “turned from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thess 1:8-10). This change was radical and very apparent to all. These pagans, now turned Christians, not only broke away from false worship, but they severed ties with all of the immorality that was commonly associated with those who refuse to have the true God in their knowledge (see Rom 1:21-32).

If you are already a convert of Christ, does your life reflect the change that comes with full conviction? If you are not yet a convert of Jesus, won’t you let the power of full conviction in a Divine message produce these changes? In either case, it is my prayer that we all live the life that results from full conviction about Jesus - a life of work and steadfastness- a life that is *strong* enough to stand the test, *sure* enough to speak up, and *changed* enough to be noticed...

. Joining Paul and Silas

When Luke wrote the inspired historical account of the conversions in Thessalonica he simply recorded that they “joined Paul and Silas” (Acts 17:4). By this time in Luke’s letter to Theophilus (1:1), he had related the details of man’s response to the gospel many times. It was unnecessary to spell them out every time. That they “joined Paul and Silas” meant that they met Christ’s conditions of salvation, that they became Christians (Acts 11:26), that they became a part of the church, Christ’s group of people who build their lives on the foundation of who He is (Mt 16:18).

In order to “join Paul and Silas”, those in Thessalonica who were persuaded as to the identity of Jesus confessed their faith with their mouth as the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37). In order to “join Paul and Silas” they repented and were baptized as 3,000 did in their glad response to the first preaching of the gospel (Acts 2:38, 41). In repentance, they committed to turn away from serving self and sin to serve Jesus and righteousness. And, in baptism they were immersed in water for the remission of their sins (see also Acts 8:36-38).

If you have not become a Christian, a member of Christ’s group of people who are built on the foundation of who He is, won’t you, as the Thessalonians “join Paul and Silas”? You can do so by your confession of who He is, repentance, and baptism. If you have done so, are you living like Paul and Silas and like the Thessalonians- like people live when they respond to a Divinely powerful message- like people live when they respond to the gospel with full conviction?

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Wednesday

Bible Study 7:00 PM

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