

Paul the Preacher & Teacher

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Text: 1 Thessalonians 1-3

Introduction:

- I. In the Preface to his 1918 classic *Eminent Victorians*, Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) described how a careful writer might approach a vast subject (like the history of the Victorian era): “He will row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity.” (Cited in Joseph J Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, p ix-x)
- II. When studying the apostle Paul and his work, we are faced with a veritable ocean of material.
 - A. Approximately half of Acts is devoted to him, where Luke provides a wealth of biographical material.
 - B. Approximately half of the NT originates with him, where Paul himself provides a wealth of autobiographical material.
 - C. In addition to this there is a vast amount of secondary literature about Paul and his writings.
 - D. Where do we begin?
- III. This paper attempts to look at Paul as a preacher in light of his work in Thessalonica. Our “bucket” is the information we have from his labors there. Our “ocean” is the backdrop of his total ministry as presented in Acts and his epistles.
- IV. Preview
 - A. Paul’s Background
 - B. Paul’s Method
 - C. Paul’s Content
 - D. Paul’s Approach
 - E. Paul’s Character
 - F. Paul’s Legacy

All Scripture quotations (unless otherwise noted) are from the New American Standard Bible (95).

Body:

- I. **Paul’s Background**
 - A. Paul’s was uniquely qualified as a preacher of the gospel.
 1. He was a Jew and a Roman citizen.
 2. He was steeped in a tradition of Pharisaic Judaism, but apparently also had the advantage of a good secular education.
 3. This combination of factors contributed to his success.
 - B. His Jewish Heritage:
 1. He was full-blooded Hebrew.
 - a. See Acts 22.3; 26.4; Php. 3.5.

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- b. His parents were Hebrew.
 - c. He was a Benjamite whose Hebrew name was Saul (Acts 7.59; 9.1ff), likely named for the first king of Israel, a fellow Benjamite.
 - d. He was circumcised the 8th day as the Law commanded (Gen. 17.10-14; Lev. 12.3).
 - e. He spoke Aramaic (Acts 22.2; cf.. 26.14) and possibly Hebrew. (Witherington, Rhetoric 99-104)
 - 1) In a Hebrew household, Aramaic (not Greek) would have been the primary language.
 - 2) Aramaic would also have been spoken in the synagogues as well. (Bruce, Paul 43)
2. He was a full-fledged Pharisee.
 - a. See Acts 22.3; 23.6; 24.15; 26.5-8; Gal. 1.14; Php. 3.5.
 - b. He was apparently brought to Jerusalem as a child or young man and eventually, at about age thirteen, educated at the feet of Gamaliel. (Witherington, Acts 669)
 - 1) Gamaliel was a leading Pharisee of the period (cf. Acts 5.34-29).
 - 2) Gamaliel was the successor (possibly descendent) of Hillel. (Bruce, Paul 50)
 - 3) As a Pharisee, Paul would have strictly observed Sabbath laws, food restrictions, and tithing. (Bruce, Paul 46)
 - 4) He would have believed in bodily resurrection, angels, and spirits (Acts 23.8).
 3. He was fully devoted to the Law.
 - a. “Strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons” (Acts 22.3f).
 - b. “I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day” (Acts 23.1).
 - c. “Believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets” (Acts 24.14).
 - d. “In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men” (Acts 24.16).
 - e. “How I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it” (Gal. 1.13).
 - f. “As to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (Php. 3.6).
 4. He was well-connected within the Jerusalem establishment.
 - a. “From [the high priest and Council] I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished” (Acts 22.5).
 - b. “Having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them” (Acts 26.10).
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- c. “With the authority and commission of the chief priests” (Acts 26.12).
- d. See also Acts 23.12-22.

C. His Roman Heritage:

1. He was a Roman Citizen.
 - a. See Acts 16.35-40; 21.37-40; 22.22-29; 25.6-12.
 - b. His Roman *cognomen* was Paul [*Paullus*] (Acts 13.9).
 - 1) Most likely an alternative or variation of his Hebrew name Saul.
 - 2) Which name he used probably depended upon where he was. Among Greeks or Romans, he was Paul; among Jews or in synagogues, he was Saul. (Witherington, *Acts* 401f n 168f; Ramsay, *St Paul* 81-84; Bruce, *Acts* 249 n 25)
 - c. Roman citizenship “involved the privileges of a vote in the Roman popular assemblies, the full protection of Roman law, and exemption from paying most taxes.” (Stambaugh 30)
 - d. When Paul asserted he was born a Roman citizen (Acts 22.28), this implies that his father was a citizen. (Stambaugh 30f)
 - 1) “But how did a Jewish family of Tarsus acquire this exceptional distinction... Presumably Paul’s father, grandfather or even great-grandfather had rendered some outstanding service to the Roman cause.” (Bruce, *Paul* 37)
 - e. During his extensive travels he would have carried either a *diploma civitatis Romanae* (a small document certifying birth or citizenship inscribed on a wooden diptych) or a *libellus*, a copy of a document listing a person’s citizenship status). (Witherington, *Acts* 682f; Bruce, *Paul* 39f)
2. He may have been partly educated in Tarsus.
 - a. As a Tarsian citizen (Acts 21.39), he laid claim to a rich cultural heritage.
 - b. Tarsus was the principle city of the eastern plain of Cilicia. It was fortified, and became the capital of the province (67 BC). It was a wealthy city. Under Augustus, it was free from imperial taxation. (Bruce, *Paul* 33ff)
 - c. Tarsus was a center of learning, comparable to Athens and Alexandria. Paul may have gotten some training while he lived there, either early in life, or later (Acts 9.30; 11.25). This is not incompatible with his claims of being educated by Gamaliel (Acts 22.3). (Blomberg 86; Ramsay, *Cities* 228-235)
 - d. Paul knew Greek (Acts 21.37) and was apparently well-versed in the LXX. (Witherington, *Rhetoric* 99-104)
 - e. Paul demonstrates a good understanding of the pagan outlook. In several places, he quotes or alludes to Greek poets, and used them effectively:
 - 1) Acts 17.28: “In him we live and move and exist” — Epimenides, *Cretica* 4. (Bruce, *Acts* 338f; Witherington, *Acts* 529f)
 - 2) Acts 17.28: “For we also are his children” — Aratus, *Phainomena* 5. (Witherington, *Acts* 529f; Bruce, *Acts* 338f)
 - 3) Acts 26.14: “It is hard for you to kick against the goads” was a common Greek proverb, not found in any Aramaic sources — Euripides, *Bacchae*

794f; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1624; Terence, *Phormio* 1.2.27. (Witherington, *Acts* 743; Bruce, *Acts* 466, n 25)

- 4) 1 Cor. 15.33: “Bad company corrupts good morals” refers to Euripides’ *Aiolas*. It also appears in the play *Thais* by Menander. (Fee, *Corinthians* 772f)
- 5) Tit. 1.12: “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” — Epimenides, *Cretica* 2; also Callimachus, *Hymn to Zeus* 8. (Bruce, *Acts* 338f n 75; Mounce, *Pastoral* 397f)

D. Few men were as well qualified as Saul of Tarsus to address so wide a range of people, in so wide a range of circumstances, in so a wide range of places, and with such success.

II. Paul’s Method

A. His choice of cities:

1. A number of conditions (beyond the mere fact of his citizenship) permitted Paul to evangelize freely throughout the Roman Empire: (M. Green 13-28)
 - a. The *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace): Peace around the Mediterranean rim; military presence throughout the Empire; established roadways that were free to travel; no passports needed or taxes imposed upon citizens; established rights of citizens. (Stambaugh 37f)
 - b. Greek language and culture: Hellenization of the Mediterranean rim; Koine Greek as a universal language; common culture; common modes of thought. (Allen 14; Stambaugh 13-17, 88-91)
 - c. Jewish Religion: Diaspora Jews throughout the Empire; synagogues throughout the Empire; considered a legal religion by Rome; provided a starting point for evangelism. (Allen 15)
2. Paul seemed to gravitate toward cities that were:
 - a. Urban centers: “With few exceptions, Paul concentrates on the major urban centers of the Roman Empire, because from them his message will easily spread into the more rural regions (whereas movement in the reverse direction was by no means as common).” (Blomberg 51)
 - b. Governmental centers: Paul typically preached in provincial capitals, administrative centers and Roman colonies. (House 60ff)
 - c. Commercial centers: Many of these cities were seaports and major centers of commerce, industry, and trade. (Allen 15f)
 - d. Religious centers: In addition to Jewish synagogues in most of Paul’s cities, there were a wide range of pagan temples and worship centers present as well. (House 57; Stambaugh 127-137)
 - e. Cultural centers: Many cities had schools or universities, libraries, amphitheatres, gymnasia, baths, festivals, etc. (Stambaugh 118-121)
 - f. Note:
 - 1) Compare the similar list of Paul’s strategic points in Allen’s *Missionary Methods* (12-17).
 - 2) There are exceptions to these criteria, but Paul seemed to prefer working in cities with these traits.

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- 3) People came to cities like these to do business and would leave with something to take home. In the first century, converts would take the gospel home with them.
 - 4) Note some of Paul's strategies (Acts 16.6-10; 19.21; Rom. 15.14-33).
- B. His choice of venues:
1. Synagogues: (Stambaugh 48ff, 141f; Allen 15; M. Green 194ff)
 - a. There were synagogues throughout the Roman Empire.
 - b. They were places of worship, instruction and social interaction.
 - c. They were points of contact with Jews, proselytes, and God-fearers.
 - d. See Acts 13.5, 14; 14.1; 17.1, 10, 17; 18.4, 19, 26; 19.8.
 2. Other venues:
 - a. Places of prayer (Acts 16.13, 16)
 - b. The market place (*agora*) (Acts 17.17)
 - c. Local council meeting places, like the Areopagus (Acts 17.22ff)
 - d. Houses (Acts 18.7; 20.8 [?])
 - e. Schools (Acts 19.9f)
- C. His choice of teaching methods:
1. Thessalonica as a sample (Acts 17.2-3)
 - a. "Reasoned" — *dialegomai* (διαλεγομαι)
 - 1) "To converse, discourse with one, argue, discuss" (Thayer 139a)
 - 2) "To speak in a somewhat formal setting and probably implying a more formal use of language — 'to address, to make a speech.'" (Louw 33.26)
 - 3) "To reason, argue, prove, persuade... In [Acts] *dialegomai* is carried out primarily through preaching and teaching, often based on Scripture. Such reasoning apparently could go on for quite some time with Paul 9.20.7, 9)." (Mounce, *Expository* 561b-562a)
 - 4) "The meaning of *dialegomai* in *cl.* and Hellenistic Gk. is expressed by our loanword dialogue; it means hold a conversation, chat. It was used by the poets with a neutral sense, but in the philosophers it came to mean conversation with teaching as its object: one debates and learns in so doing. The vb. *dialogizomai*, calculate, consider, think through, is closely linked with it, and similarly the noun *dialogismos*, weighing, consideration, thought, discussion." (Brown G1363)
 - 5) 10 of 13 references occur in Acts, always of Paul's activities (Acts 17.2, 17; 18.4, 19; 19.8, 9; 20.7, 9; 24.12, 25).
 - 6) It can range from reasoning (Acts 17.2), to lively discussion (Mk. 9.34), to dispute (Jude 9).
 - 7) "The word here has become a technical term for Paul's teaching in the synagogue and approaches the meaning of give an address, preach. It refers to the reading and exposition of the OT, which were, in theory at least,
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permitted to every adult man in the synagogue (cf. Lk. 4:16-21). The RSV rendering ‘argue’ is justified in so far as the audience was permitted to ask questions” (Brown G1363)

- 8) Here Paul reasoned “from the Scriptures” — it involved biblical exegesis.
- b. “Explaining” — *dianoigo* (διανοιγω)
 - 1) “To open up completely” (Vine 823)
 - 2) “To open the sense of the Scriptures, explain them; to open the mind of one, i.e., cause him to understand a thing; to open one’s soul, i.e., to rouse in one the faculty of understanding or the desire of learning” (Thayer 140b)
 - 3) Of eight NT uses, five are metaphorical, in the sense of recognition or understanding — Lk. 24.31 (recognition of a person); Lk. 24.32; Acts 17.3 (understanding of Scripture); Lk. 24.45 (a person’s mind); Acts 16.14 (a person’s heart)
 - 4) Here, Paul “opened” the Scriptures in the course of his synagogue discussion; he made them plain by drawing from them and clarifying them.
- c. “Giving evidence” — *paratithemi* (παρατιθημι)
 - 1) “To place beside or before, while often used in its literal sense of material things, as well as in its more common significance, to commit, entrust, twice means to set before one in teaching, as in putting forth a parable. Once it is used of setting subjects before one’s hearers by way of argument and proof” (Vine 49)
 - 2) “To place beside, place near or set before; to set before (one) in teaching; to set forth (from one’s self), to explain” (Thayer 486b)
 - 3) “He brought forward as evidence of their fulfillment the historical facts recently accomplished in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, setting these events alongside the predictions in order that the force of his argument might be readily grasped.” (Bruce, *Acts* 323)
2. ”Paul, then, is said to be engaging in an act of persuasion or rhetoric in the synagogue. The verbs διανοιγων and παρατιθεμενος in v 3 indicate the process of opening the mind and understanding of the hearers followed by the putting forward of proper proofs in good rhetorical form. Taken together these two verbs explain what was meant or entailed by ‘argue’ or ‘dialogue’ referred to in the previous verse.” (Witherington, *Acts* 505)
3. See below under “Paul’s Approach”.

D. Results:

1. The immediate results in Thessalonica were much like other places where Paul preached — a mixed response of belief and unbelief. Here, it was followed by violence. See Acts 17.4-9.
 - a. “Some of [the Jews] were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas” (v 4a)
 - b. “Along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks” (v 4b)
 - c. “And a number of the leading women” (v 4c)
2. 1 & 2 Thessalonians reflect Paul’s concern with their long-term survival. Could this young group of Christians survive? Thus...

- a. Paul's relief that they saw his teaching as God's word (1 Th. 2.13).
 - b. Paul's relief that they had followed the lead of Judean churches by persevering in persecution (1 Th. 2.14-16).
 - c. Paul's anxiety at being unable to see them (1 Th. 2.17-20).
 - d. Paul's dispatch of Timothy to Thessalonica (1 Th. 3.1-5).
 - e. Reminders of things they already knew (see below under "Paul's Content").
 - f. Supplemental information they do not yet have (*e.g.*, 1 Th. 4.13-18).
3. Most impressive is that after no more than a few tumultuous months in this city, Paul left behind an autonomous, growing group of believers.
- a. "In little more than ten years... St Paul could speak as if his work [in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia] was done, and could plan extensive tours into the far west without anxiety lest the churches which he had founded might perish in his absence for want of his guidance and support." (Allen 3)
 - b. "The churches were really established. Whatever disasters fell upon them in later years, whatever failure there was, whatever ruin, that failure was not due to any insufficiency or lack of care and completeness in the Apostle's teaching or organization. When he left them he left them because his work was fully accomplished." (Allen 3)

III. Paul's Content

- A. What did Paul teach in Thessalonica? There are two sources of information.
1. The narrative in Acts 17
 2. Inferences from 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Note such statements as: (Plevnik 53f)
 - a. "You yourselves know" (1 Th. 2.1; 3.3; 5.2; 2 Th. 3.7)
 - b. "You recall" (1 Th. 5.9)
 - c. "You know" (1 Th. 2.11; 3.4; 4.2; 2 Th. 2.6)
 - d. "We kept telling you" or "we told you" (1 Th. 3.4; 4.6; 2 Th. 2.5)
 - e. "As you received instruction from us" (1 Th. 4.1)
 - f. "You have no need for anyone to write to you" (1 Th. 4.9; 5.1)
 - g. "You were taught" (2 Th. 2.15)
 - h. "We used to give you this order" (2 Th. 3.10)
- B. Content: (Allen 68f; Plevnik 53-59)
1. Acts 17.1-9:
 - a. Christ had to suffer, die, and be raised (Acts 17.3)
 - b. "This Jesus" (Acts 17.3) — they knew something of the life of Christ
 - c. Jesus is Christ (Acts 17.3)
 - d. Jesus is king (Acts 17.7)
 2. 1 Thessalonians:

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- a. The true God versus idols (1 Th. 1.9)
 - b. Jesus' return (1 Th. 1.10)
 - c. Christ saves us from the wrath of judgment (1 Th. 1.10; cf. 2.15f)
 - d. Walking worthily of their calling (1 Th. 2.12)
 - e. Their suffering (1 Th. 3.4)
 - f. The believer's walk in the kingdom (1 Th. 4.1, 11f)
 - g. Sanctification and sexual purity (1 Th. 4.3-6)
 - h. The Lord avenges wrongs (1 Th. 4.6; cf. 2.15f)
 - i. Brotherly love (1 Th. 4.9f; cf. 3.6)
 - j. Work quietly to properly influence outsiders (1 Th. 4.11f).
 - k. The coming of the Lord will be like a thief (1 Th. 5.1f).
 - l. Believers should eagerly anticipate Jesus' return (1 Th. 5.4ff; 1.10).
3. 2 Thessalonians:
 - a. The man of lawlessness, the apostasy (2 Th. 2.1-6, esp 5f).
 - b. Teachings on the purpose of the second coming (2 Th. 2.15, cf. v 1ff).
 - c. Steadfastness in persecution (2 Th. 3.1-5)
 - d. Work as a moral imperative (2 Th. 3.6-10).
- C. By way of summary, Paul included...
1. Teaching about the true God.
 2. Teaching about the life, person, work and identity of Jesus.
 3. Teaching about sin and redemption.
 4. Teaching about the second coming (its nature, purpose and attitudes about it).
 5. Teaching about Christian living, including our work ethic, sexual morals, brotherly love, and sanctification.
 6. Teaching about persecution.
- D. Significance:
1. "Paul's frequent references in 1 Thessalonians to his previous instruction reflect the closeness to his mission in Thessalonica, the need to supplement that instruction and to affirm the believers in their young faith amidst trials. These fragments of and allusions to the initiation in the faith give us a glimpse of what that was like." (Plevnik 59)
 2. "It has become clear that the apostle's writings can be understood only in relation to the underlying initiation in the faith. It is this presumed instruction that gives to these letters a unity and a framework of interpretation." (Plevnik 60)
- E. Note:
1. This is remarkable in view of how little time he was there.
 2. It shows purpose and discipline in his teaching.
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3. It shows what he deemed as essential to their spiritual development.
4. What would be on your list?

IV. Paul's Approach

- A. As we've already seen, Paul's teaching method was to persuade his hearers by using sound biblical argumentation (Acts 17.2f).
 1. This becomes a theme in Acts, as Luke presents Paul in a favorable way as teacher who won converts through sound rhetoric rather than cheap tricks or deceptive tactics.
 - a. "Reason" or *dialegomai* (διαλεγομαι) occurs 10 times in Acts, always in reference to Paul's teaching (Acts 17.2, 17; 18.4, 19; 19.8, 9; 20.7, 9; 24.12, 25).
 - b. "Persuade" or *peitho* (πειθο) refers to (a) Paul's attempts to convince or win over his hearers (Acts 13.43; 18.4; 19.8, 26; 28.23), and (b) the response of Paul's hearers who were convinced of his teachings (Acts 17.4; 26.28; 28.24). (Vine 861; Mounce, Expository 509b-510a; Thayer 497b-498a)
 2. In other words, Paul appears to have been well-versed in the use of rhetoric, and employed it in both his speeches and in his letters. (Blomberg 95-106)
- B. Greco-Roman Rhetoric
 1. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion.
 - a. "The Greeks and Romans made persuasion an art and a science. The efficient running of a city, the administration of justice and the promotion of civic values all depended on the ability of private citizens to argue their case effectively." (deSilva 381)
 2. Rhetoric employed three kinds of appeals in a discourse (usually in this order):
 - a. Ethos: The moral character and trustworthiness of the speaker.
 - 1) "...the rhetorician sought to establish rapport and authority with his audience. *Ethos* was all about establishing the speaker's character and making clear he was trustworthy and believable." (Witherington, *Rhetoric* 15)
 - 2) "A speaker must have our trust and confidence if she or he is to persuade us to do anything; conversely, questions about a speaker's credibility prove the quickest and most effective means to undermining his or her message... We trust those whom we deem well-disposed toward us, rather than those who seem antagonistic or derogatory..." (deSilva 508)
 - 3) "If we truly love souls, and our purposes to lead people out of darkness into light, all the more reason to cultivate their confidence and impress them with our fairness and good will. We defeat these noble purposes when we pounce upon every conceived missed word or wrong judgment as grist for our mill. A teacher **assists** hearers and readers to know and understand more perfectly, and **encourages** them to live a better life. Reproof and rebukes are made with a heavy heart, not as haughty ego trips. So, there are **two** requirements of the godly teacher. The **content** of his teaching must be pure and right; but he must also do his job in the right **way**, with the **right spirit**." (Turner, *Attitudes*)
 - b. Logos: The facts, arguments, proofs and logic of a given case.
 - 1) "...the real meat of the discourse, its emotion-charged arguments." (Witherington, *Rhetoric* 15)

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- 2) "...rational proofs — the substance of the speech — needed to be presented, often using both inductive and deductive forms of argumentation." (deSilva 781)
 - c. Pathos: The emotions of the hearers.
 - 1) "...the hearers themselves had to be put in a certain frame of mind that would make them more likely to act in the way, or to decide in the direction, that the speaker was guiding them." (deSilva 781f)
 - 2) "At the end of the discourse the rhetorician needed to appeal to the deep emotions — love or hate, grief or joy, anger or pity — and so create *pathos* in the audience in order for the hearers to embrace the arguments not merely intellectually but affectively as well." (Witherington, *Rhetoric* 16)
 3. A discourse was classified in one of three ways, depending upon its purpose:
 - a. Judicial or forensic rhetoric:
 - 1) "...the rhetoric of the law court, the rhetoric of attack and defense, and it focused on things done in the past. This was the type of rhetoric most frequently practiced in the NT era." (Witherington, *Rhetoric* 14)
 - 2) "Forensic rhetoric could be employed outside the setting of a legal court wherever issues of blame or innocence were involved." (deSilva 382)
 - b. Deliberative rhetoric:
 - 1) "Speeches aimed at weighing the pros and cons of one course of action over another and urging a particular response." (deSilva 381)
 - 2) "...the rhetoric of the 'assembly' ... and was the rhetoric of advice and consent, trying to get one course of action or another, one policy or another voted on in an affirmative manner. The temporal focus of deliberative rhetoric was the future since change was sought in some policy or action in the near future." (Witherington, *Rhetoric* 14)
 - 3) "...the NT... more frequently exhibits deliberative rhetoric as it seeks to persuade people to change their beliefs and behaviors. It should be added that deliberative rhetoric was, however, still in play in the Roman Empire... in ambassadorial missions when one group or country was negotiating with others to conclude some kind of pact or treaty." (Witherington, *Rhetoric* 14)
 - 4) "What is revealing about the predilection for deliberative rhetoric in the NT is that it suggests that the orator believes the audience is free to respond positively or not and, therefore, needs to be persuaded. In other words, good evangelism and good preaching involved persuasion..." (Witherington, *Rhetoric* 15)
 - c. Epideictic rhetoric:
 - 1) "The public forum provided a place for ceremony, for remembrance of the dead, and hence for *epideictic* oratory. The funeral eulogy is the prototype of this kind of rhetoric, where the deceased would be praised for their virtues or perhaps condemned for their vices, with the result that the audience would be reminded of what values and the kind of life led to honor and what kind of life led to dishonor." (deSilva 381)
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- 2) “Epidictic rhetoric moved beyond the public forum very early because praise or censure of a living individual was already an essential element of legal speeches and deliberative speeches by Aristotle’s time.” (deSilva 382)
 - 3) “Finally there was epideictic rhetoric, the rhetoric of display. Its social venues included the *agora* (for entertainment), the funeral (for encomiums or eulogies), or celebrations (e.g., the proconsul’s birthday). This was the rhetoric of praise and blame — more praise than blame especially at funerals. Its temporal focus was the present. It did not seek to change beliefs, behaviors, opinions, or attitudes, but rather it sought to reinforce existing ones.” (Witherington, *Rhetoric* 15)
4. A typical speech had a predictable, rhetorically sound structure: (deSilva 578; Witherington, *Rhetoric* 16; Blomberg 96)
- a. *Exordium* (introduction): The beginning of the discourse; attempted to establish a rapport and credibility with the audience.
 - b. *Narratio* (explaining the nature of the issue to be discussed): Laying out a brief history or set of relevant facts; sometimes omitted.
 - c. *Propositio* (the thesis to be defended): Usually in the form of a thesis statement; the key to understanding the discourse; could come before or after the *narratio*.
 - d. *Probatio* (arguments or proofs): Proofs could be deductive or inductive, and usually comprised the longest part of the discourse; presented in defense of the speaker’s thesis or case.
 - e. *Refutatio* (refuting the opponent’s position): Usually followed the *probatio*; reinforced the speaker’s view by refuting his opponent’s position.
 - f. *Peroratio* (summary and final appeal): reiterated the main themes or points of the discourse; often made a final emotional appeal to help persuade.

C. Ancient Letters:

1. In addition to understanding how ancient speakers tried to persuade their audiences, it is also helpful to understand some of the literary conventions of their day.
2. A typical ancient letter had a specific form and structure: (Blomberg 95f; deSilva 531f; Witherington, *Rhetoric* 111f)
 - a. Typical elements and structure:
 - 1) Introduction: with the author’s name; the addressees; a short greeting, prayer or thanksgiving.
 - 2) Body: the main information; may include exhortations or requests.
 - 3) Conclusion: usually brief, reiterating main idea; may include personal details.
 - b. Paul’s variations:
 - 1) Introduction: Paul (sometimes with associates); addressees; greeting (“Grace and peace”); thanksgiving and/or prayer.
 - 2) Body: thesis statement; body proper; concluding doxology.
 - 3) Conclusion: travelogue; exhortations; closing greetings; signature; benediction.

3. Ancient letter types:
 - a. There was a wide variety of purposes and types of letters in antiquity. (Blomberg 98ff; deSilva 532ff)
 - b. They included: “friendship” letters; “commendatory” letters; “consoling” letters; “admonishing” letters; “threatening” letters; “censuring” letters; “praising” letters; “encouraging” letters; “advisory” letters; “supplicatory” letters; “inquiring” letters; “responding” letters; “figurative” or “allegorical” letters; “accounting” letters; “accusing” letters; “apologetic” letters; “congratulatory” letters; “thankful” letters; “moral” letters; “prayerful” letters; “reporting” letters; “didactic” letters.
 - c. In reality, most letters exhibited a mixture of types. This is especially true of the NT letters, which were typically much longer than normal letters.

D. Paul’s Rhetoric:

1. Paul’s public preaching to both Jew and Gentile exhibits a solid rhetorical approach:
 - a. Five consistent elements: (Allen 63)
 - 1) An appeal to common ground.
 - 2) A statement of factual information.
 - 3) Offering proofs and answering potential objections.
 - 4) An appeal to the spiritual needs of the audience.
 - 5) A warning about the consequences of rejecting the message.
 - b. Four characteristics: (Allen 63f)
 - 1) Sympathy and a conciliatory attitude toward his audience.
 - 2) Openly acknowledging areas of disagreement and difficulty.
 - 3) Respect for his hearers.
 - 4) Confidence in the message.
 - c. Note: Allen does not use the term “rhetoric,” although that is what he is describing. His list of elements is consistent with typical rhetorical structure. His list of characteristics is consistent with the typical kinds of rhetorical appeals.
2. Paul’s letters exhibit both literary and rhetorical traits.
 - a. His letters exhibit the typical introductory and concluding statements, and the normal overall structure. He also modified these elements to reflect his specific perspective as a Christian.
 - b. The bodies of his letters exhibit traits consistent with discourse rhetoric.
 - 1) This is not surprising since his letters were apparently intended to be read aloud (1 Th. 5.27; Col. 4.16; 1 Tim. 4.13).
 - 2) This is also consistent with the fact that only 5-20% of ancient people could read. They usually relied on someone else to read to them. (Witherington, *Rhetoric* 1, 96f)

E. Value of Rhetoric and Rhetorical Analysis:

1. First, it helps us appreciate all the more the kind of intellect and skill Paul used in his work. When he said that he had “become all things to all men” (1 Cor. 9.19-23), it included his very mode of thinking and speaking.
2. Second, it helps us understand how Paul reasoned with his audiences, both in speech and in writing. It is easy to impose a modern paradigm of persuasion on an ancient text, but we lose something in the translation. Rhetorical studies help us look at things in their proper context.
3. Third, it helps us as we try to persuade others.
 - a. Logic and facts alone seldom move unbelievers to action. They must be persuaded and encouraged by appeals to their hearts as well as their heads. (Witherington, *Rhetoric* 237-240)
 - b. “Too many Christians, especially teachers of the word of God, have lost touch with the hearts of those whom they propose to teach. Their powers of intellect may be great, their knowledge and experience extensive, and their speech polished and eloquent, but they have lost touch with the hearts of people. They have become insensitive to the weaknesses, the needs, the problems, and the feelings of their fellows. Sympathy, tenderness, and compassion have been sacrificed to knowledge, logic, and eloquence. The *hearts* of people must be reached if they are to be *converted to Christ*. May Christians never allow pride, selfishness, or conceit to rob them of that sense of spiritual touch which can play such beautiful music upon the cords of human hearts.” (Adams)
 - c. How do we persuade others? A good example comes from James W Sire, who often presents lectures on college campuses about the validity of Christianity. At some point in the lectures, he presents the following five reasons why Christianity is true. The parentheses describe the kinds of appeals each argument makes: (Sire 146-154)
 - 1) Jesus himself is the best reason for believing in the truth of the Christian religion (*rationally strong, personally compelling*).
 - 2) The gospels give a reliable account of what Jesus did and, especially, said about us and himself (*rationally compelling*).
 - 3) The Christian worldview is consistent and coherent. It explains better than any alternative the vast array of phenomena presented to human beings (*rationally strong, personally compelling*).
 - 4) Christians testify to their changed lives (*philosophically weak but personally compelling*).
 - 5) The history of the church points to the attractiveness of Jesus’ agenda, the kingdom of God; witness, for example, the number of religious-based hospitals and charitable groups around the world (*an ambiguous, but ultimately positive reason*).
 - d. Sire employs the fundamentals of rhetoric to present a well-rounded case for Christianity. He appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos to affirm the truth of the proposition.
4. The goal of preaching is to strike the heart and the head — “Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart...” (Acts 2.37).

V. Paul’s Character

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- A. The one indispensable trait of a preacher is his character. He cannot speak reliably about what he does not know personally.
1. “But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE,” we also believe, therefore we also speak” (2 Cor. 4.13).
 2. “Preaching is not just the distribution of the message of the gospel. It’s living the gospel at the same time. A good preacher emulates the message even as he delivers it; it’s more than his passion, it’s his model for living. The gospel’s originator is his Master and he counts it a blessed privilege not only to distribute the teachings of his mentor, but to illustrate them in his life while he’s doing it.” (Bowman)
 3. “Passionate preaching is a product of character, the purposely-developed qualities of the person. Character is the product of conviction, conviction that comes from deep faith... Gospel preachers who do not believe profoundly that Jesus is the only hope for sinful men and women to escape hell and gain heaven cannot preach with true passion, and a man preaching from deep faith does not need to think about passion for it is an inseparable part of his character.” (Earnhart 18)
 4. “Passionate preaching does indeed derive from deep faith and conviction but these demand a genuine effort to practice what one preaches. Character is more than mere conviction of righteousness; it is the determined effort to experience that righteousness in life... what we are attaches itself to what we preach. It either adds depth and force to the impact of God’s word on listeners or weakens and diminishes it.” (Earnhart 18)
- B. Unlike texts such as Galatians or 1 & 2 Corinthians, Paul’s character is not under direct assault in 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Nonetheless, his character is clearly on display as he writes to them about his work and his attitude toward them. His character undergirds these letters.
- C. Some observations about his character as seen in 1 & 2 Thessalonians:
1. He put his character before these young converts as an example to follow.
 - a. “...just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us...” (1 Th. 1.5b-6a).
 - b. “For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers” (1 Th. 2.9f).
 - c. “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example” (2 Th. 3.7ff).
 - d. Note: One particular aspect of his character was his work ethic. There appear to be two reasons for this:
 - 1) As a counter-example to those in Thessalonica who were lazy.
 - 2) To counter the possible charge that Paul was a charlatan, that he was some sort of itinerant philosopher who passed through town, took their money, and left them with nothing. This point also accounts for the many assertions
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about his care for them. He was not a spiritual snake-oil salesman! (Allen 49f; Stambaugh 143ff)

2. He was intensely concerned about their spiritual well-being.
 - a. “But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children” (1 Th. 2.7).
 - b. “...just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Th. 2.11f).
 - c. “Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith...” (1 Th. 3.1f).
 - d. “For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you...” (1 Th. 3.5f).
3. He was willing to suffer for Christ’s sake and for theirs.
 - a. “For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition” (1 Th. 2.1f).
 - b. “Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-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 Th. 2.8).
 - c. “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out” (1 Th. 2.14f).
 - d. “...so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know” (1 Th. 3.3f).
 - e. “Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith” (2 Th. 3.1f).
4. He was transparent about his motives.
 - a. “For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; but 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. For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed — God is witness — nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others; even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority” (1 Th. 2.3-6).

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- b. “But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while — in person, not in spirit — were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, more than once — and yet Satan hindered us” (1 Th. 2.17f).
5. He commended (to them and others) their growth; he was not pessimistic about them.
 - a. “We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you...” (1 Th. 1.2ff).
 - b. “You became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven...” (1 Th. 1.6-10).
 - c. “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews...” (1 Th. 2.14).
 - d. “But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord” (1 Th. 3.6ff).
 - e. “Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk)...” (1 Th. 4.1).
 - f. “Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia” (1 Th. 4.9f).
 - g. “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure” (1 Th. 1.3f).
 - h. “We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command” (1 Th. 3.4).
 6. He trusted God’s power to transform them. They should not rely on him, but God.
 - a. “...for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit...” (1 Th. 1.5).
 - b. “For this reason 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 Th. 2.13).
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- c. “Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all people, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints” (1 Th. 3.11ff).
 - d. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass” (1 Th. 5.23f).
 - e. “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word” (2 Th. 2.16f).
 - f. “But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one” (2 Th. 3.3).
 - g. “May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ” (2 Th. 3.5).
 - h. “Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all” (2 Th. 3.16).
- D. The cumulative effect of these statements was a healthy dose of encouragement to a group of spiritually young disciples. He gives them encouragement, reassurance, and strength to endure what was an already difficult situation.
- E. On preaching and character:
- 1. In rhetorical terms, our character provides us with ethos. Our character provides credibility that is necessary if we wish to reach people in any meaningful way.
 - 2. “What is preaching? It is the humbling, dedication of self to the noble task of teaching the incomparable message of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is concern for the lost, and brotherly love for the saved, that puts their welfare above self (Philippians 2.3-4). It is a lifetime of study and involvement, and a determination to live as an example to others. It is all this and more — or it is a hypocritical sham, a commercializing of sacred things, a shameful disgrace. Perhaps this is why some elderly preachers advise the young: ‘Don’t preach if you can help it.’ Those who ‘can’t help it’ will be adequate for God’s service, and will wear themselves out in preparation for heaven.” (Turner, *Preaching*)

VI. Paul’s Legacy

A. A legacy of *preparation*

- 1. Biblical preparation:
 - a. Paul had a good religious education (Acts 22.3), and he used it.
 - b. He was well versed in the Scriptures, and used them effectively.
- 2. Academic preparation:
 - a. Paul apparently had a good secular education, and he used it.
 - b. He understood the pagan worldview and could address it, sometimes even quoting their own writers.

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- c. He also made good use of rhetoric. He was a very persuasive speaker, regardless of his audience. He shaped the message to fit the audience.
 - 1) Note Paul's nine speeches or sermons in Acts in chapters 13, 14, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28.
 - 2) Consider the wide variations in audience, circumstances, and subject matter.
 - 3. Life preparation:
 - a. When he became Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1940, Winston Churchill said, "all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial."
 - b. For Paul, and for all the great leaders in the Bible, their lives were preparation for their work in God's kingdom.
 - 4. Because of his preparation, Paul could effectively present the gospel to a diverse range of people, because he understood their perspective. What talents, experiences, skills and training do you bring to your preaching? Do you use all available resources?
 - a. Preachers must have three distinct skill sets to help make them effective: Biblical exegesis skills, public speaking and teaching skills, and people skills.
 - b. "Some men are 'out of place;' they are poorly trained, unsuited, may lack temperament and ability to meet the demands of the particular job they are trying to do. In other circumstances they may do well — and experience will broaden the field where they are suited to the work." (Turner, *Preach*)
 - c. "But it is rightly expected that one called 'preacher' should have exceptional talent for study, understanding, and presentation, so that he teaches well... Teaching involves learning. He has not taught unless he has imparted information; and in the fuller sense, unless the hearer has so learned as to be affected by the message." (Turner, *Preachers* 4)
 - d. "I strongly recommend college-grade Bible studies, at the feet of well-educated, competent men. Research papers, testing, practice debates, etc. are desirable. Speech work, composition, ancient history, and many other secular studies can greatly assist one in effectively presenting truth... The more determined he is to teach others, the more willing he is to improve native talents and develop new ones." (Turner, *Preacher* 5)
- B. A legacy of *purpose*
- 1. Careful study of how Paul approached his work reveals that there was nothing random about it. He seemed to have a plan for his work.
 - a. His choice of cities
 - b. His overall plan for evangelism (cf. Rom. 15.18ff, 22-29)
 - c. His carefully reasoned approach to preaching & teaching (Acts 20.20f, 27, 31)
 - 2. How purposeful are we in our own work?
 - a. Do we have a carefully reasoned approach in our teaching?
 - b. Do we have a comprehensive plan to our preaching?
 - c. Do we employ a wide range of approaches in our teaching and preaching?
- C. A legacy of *passion*
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1. He was devoted to the Lord (Php. 3.7-16).
2. He was devoted to his fellow Jews (Rom. 10.1-4).
3. He loved his fellow man (1 Cor. 4.8-16; 2 Cor. 4.1-12; 6.1-13).

Conclusion:

- I. In the introduction of his biography of Paul, F F Bruce justified his efforts by saying, “No excuse is offered for the publication of yet another book on Paul save the excuse offered by the second-century author of the *Acts of Paul*: it was written *amore Pauli*, for love of Paul.” (Bruce, *Paul* 15)
- II. Any time a group of preachers gather, almost invariably we discuss Paul. Like Bruce, we offer no more reason than “love of Paul.” In him we sense both a kindred spirit and a worthy model.
- III. As for me, when I study and contemplate Paul, I am at once embarrassed by him, condemned by him, instructed by him, inspired by him, challenged by him, and encouraged by him.
- IV. What I see in Paul, above all else was a passion for the Lord Jesus, and a passion for his fellow man. Those two things drove him in his work (c.f., 2 Cor. 5.11-15; Php. 1.19-26). My prayer is that these two things will likewise act as fuel for the engines of our respective ministries.

*Remember that whenever you preach,
Someone may hear the gospel for the first time;
Someone else may hear the gospel for the last time.
What will you say that will make a difference to either of them?*

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