

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL IN MACEDONIA,
ACHAIA AND IN EVERY PLACE.
MISSIONS AND 1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-8

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ABSTRACT

In this article the author analyses 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 in order to illuminate missiological activities of Pauline Christianity. Paul is often regarded as the zealous missionary who took the rural, Palestinian gospel of Jesus to key cities in the Roman Empire and thus contributed decisively to the founding of Christianity. Information in this passage gives a more balanced picture of Pauline mission, illuminating its corporate nature, its outward nature and its expectations that converts should become actively involved in spreading the word in a life-embracing manner.

1. THE MISSION OF THE THESSALONIANS

Paul is often regarded as the person who enabled Christianity to break out of its restricted location in a Palestinian rural setting to major cities in the Graeco-Roman world. A particular reading of Pauline letters and Acts contributes to the portrayal of Paul as a charismatic missionary who proclaimed the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. A closer reading of these texts indicates that the Pauline ministry was more complex. They indicate that Pauline mission, conducted by a dedicated team of people who engaged in missions, also required that converts become part of such a team. This could require that they reach out to a large area in and surrounding the locations where they lived.

This article will investigate this understanding of mission by investigating the situation of the earliest Pauline community as it is partially reflected in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8. These verses reveal valuable information about one of the first known groups of Pauline converts. In 1 Thessalonians 1 the formidable team of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy addresses the church in Thessalonica that originated from their missionary endeavours. In the first part of the thanksgiving that forms the introduction to 1 Thessalonians, Paul indicated to his readers how positively he regarded the qualities that characterised their Christian lifestyle since their conversion from their hea-

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then religion and their turning away from the idols (1 Thes. 1:9). This commendation is presented in missiological terms. The qualities listed in the well-known triad of faith, love and hope (1 Thes. 1:3) are closely linked with missionary work (De Villiers 2003). They worked, toiled, and persevered *with a missionary zeal* that was firmly rooted in their faith, love, and hope.

This portrayal of the Thessalonians is intensified in the second and middle part of the thanksgiving (1 Thes. 1:6-8) with a tantalising remark about the reputation of the Christians in Thessalonica in and even beyond the two provinces that at that time constituted Greece. It is this remark that now needs further reflection in order to understand the special nature of Pauline mission better and in order to interpret Pauline letters as missiological documents more adequately.² Before this will be done, some remarks about the formal presentation and appearance of these verses will be made.

2. FORM OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE THANKSGIVING

The passage that is under investigation in this essay can be formalised as follows:³

- 2 This article continues the study entitled, “Faith, hope and love — a missionary perspective on three seminal motifs in 1 Thessalonians 1:3” (cf. De Villiers 2003) in which a too lachrymose reading of the letter, resulting in the portrayal of the Thessalonians as a weak, struggling church, was questioned.
- 3 For an analysis of the first part of the thanksgiving, cf. De Villiers (2003:38).

- A ⁶Καὶ **ὕμεις** μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν **ἐγενήθητε** καὶ τοῦ κυρίου, **you**
 δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον
 ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ
 μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου,
⁷ὥστε **γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς**
 τύπον πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν
ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ
καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ. →
-
- B ⁸(a) ἀφ' **ὑμῶν** γὰρ ἐξήχηται **you**
 (b) ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου
 (c) οὐ μόνον ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ
ἐν τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ,
 (c) ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ
 (b) ἡ πίστις **ὑμῶν** ἢ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν
 (a) ἐξελέλυθεν,⁴
 ὥστε μὴ χρεῖαν ἔχειν ἡμᾶς λαλεῖν τι. →
-
- C ⁹αὐτοὶ γὰρ περὶ ἡμῶν ἀπαγγέλλουσιν
 (a) ὅποιαν εἴσοδον ἔσχομεν πρὸς **ὑμᾶς**, **you**
 (b) καὶ πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ
 τῶν εἰδώλων
 (c) δουλεύειν θεῷ
 (d) ζῶντι καὶ
 (d) ἀληθινῷ
 (c)¹⁰καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ
 ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν,
 ὃν ἠγείρειν ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,
 Ἰησοῦν τὸν ῥυόμενον ἡμᾶς
 ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς τῆς ἐρχομένης. →

In the analysis above, this section is divided into three parts (A, B, and C). They are formed by the γάρ at the beginning of verse 8 and 9, thus relating the imitation in 6 to the witness of the Thessalonians (B) and their repentance (C; cf. the discussion about this later on). 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 forms a smaller and almost independent unit within the larger unit of 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10. It is a passage that introduces some *new thoughts* and that functions on its own, despite the fact that it is, from a syntactical perspective, strictly speaking still part of the previous sentence. Several indica-

⁴ ὅτι ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καταγγέλεται ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ. Rom. 1:8. Cf. 1:11-12.

tors, like the *καί* in verse 6 and the following verbs, require the passage to be taken as one sentence that only ends with verse 10. Its coherence with the preceding passage and with what follows is, however, not clear. Frame (1946:82), for example, noted that the verses provide further evidence of the election of the Thessalonians that Paul moots in the previous section (1:4). He regards verse 6 as a result of what preceded, since the previous *ὅτι* is still in control:

The proof of election is the presence of the Spirit not only in the preachers... but also in the hearers who welcomed the word ... with joy in the midst of the great persecution.

This understanding of Frame is not quite convincing, because the new unit does not begin with any reference to the reception of the word but explicitly refers to “imitation” of the team of apostles. Malherbe (2000:114), in similar vein, also insists that verse 6 should not be separated from verse 5, supporting Frame that *ὅτι* is still in control. The verse depends “logically” on Paul’s knowledge of their election.

That these interpretations are under pressure, is evident when Frame (1946:82) observes, “The sentence is getting to be independent” and when Malherbe (2000:114) concedes that the “grammatical connection is beginning to loosen.” Others experienced the independence more intensely. Some text editions and translations even begin a completely new sentence here (e.g. NRSV and NA²⁷) confirming that this unit displays a particular coherence that requires it to be read on its own. This is clear from the following: In the previous verses 2-5 Paul used verbs in the first person plural (e.g. *εὐχαριστοῦμεν* in v. 2 and *ἐγενήθημεν* in v. 5). In this unit the focus shifts to the Thessalonians and their Christian existence in their wider surroundings with an emphatic *ὑμεῖς* at the beginning of verse, with the second person plural pronoun, and with the (auxiliary) verbs in the plural or the second person plural (cf. the text analysis above). In the rest of verse 6 the focus is indeed on the way in which *they* received the word in difficult conditions and became an example to all believers. The second half of the thanksgiving finds cohesion in this way, thereby functioning practically like a new unit that focuses on particular contents regarding the Thessalonians.

From these remarks a first negative conclusion can be made: 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 as a new section is neither merely a repetition of ideas expressed in the previous verses nor only consoling them in their suffering (1:6). It develops in more depth a particular missionary portrayal of the Thessalonians that was adumbrated in the previous verses. They were commended in the previous section for their qualities of faith, love and hope in

such a way that the practical missionary nature of these qualities was emphasised (De Villiers 2003:42-44). This new section spells out more concretely what these practical missionary activities were (cf. also Haufe 1999: 26), as will be argued in more detail below. Haufe noted that the object of the thanksgiving is developed further in these verses: the thanksgiving relates to the initial mission of the Pauline team in Thessalonica (1:5), but also to the direct and indirect history of its results in the life of the Thessalonian church up to the time of the writing of the letter (1:6-10).

It is the contents of this history that are so interesting, though, revealing what kept the Thessalonians busy in the short time after their conversion within the wider relationships they upheld with the other churches and the activities of their founder father. It spells out that, but especially how, despite their suffering that followed their conversion, they responded to the proclamation of the word with the joy of the Holy Spirit (6). More attention needs to be given to this matter now, since not all commentators agree with this reading of the passage.

3. THE THESSALONIANS AS IMITATORS

It is significant that this passage begins with an extensive reference to imitation (cf. De Villiers 2003:47), expressed in a carefully balanced structure, as the above text analysis indicates. There are two parts in verse 6: the first part refers to the imitation of the apostles by the Thessalonians. The second part then outlines how they became examples to others. The two key words are μιμηταί and τύπον. The thrust of the passage is to point out how the example of the apostles is taken over by their converts.

This imitation-motif is of special importance for an understanding of the Pauline mission and needs more attention. It appears somewhat unexpectedly in this passage. Von Dobschütz (1909:72) regarded the reference as a loose remark that only obscures the flow of the verse. He argued that the passage without the imitation-motif refers to the election mentioned in verse 4. Paul is writing that their election has been evident from the objective proclamation of the word (v. 5) and the subjective reception (v. 6), that is, their joyful *acceptance of the word*. Within this larger framework, he states, the reference to the imitation does not fit well.

A more adequate interpretation of this passage is to link the imitation to the phrase καθὼς οἴδατε οἱ ἐγενήθημεν [ἐν] ὑμῖν δι' ὑμᾶς at the end of verse 5 which is a conclusion to the remark about the powerful proclamation of the gospel to the Thessalonians. The imitation needs to be linked with that phrase. This is confirmed and illuminated by other parts of the

letter. The Thessalonians are, according to this phrase in verse 5, aware of the Pauline proclamation. In the rest of the letter, this awareness is mooted more than once. It appears twice in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2⁵ where it is stated that the Thessalonians know that the coming of the apostles to them was not in vain. Paul writes there that the apostles, despite the difficult situation in Philippi, proclaimed the gospel boldly — adding once again the remark “as you know.”⁶ These two passages (1:6 and 2:1-2) form a chiasmic type link, as is clear from several motifs that link them and from contextual information that is given in both. Important now is the overall picture of which they are aware: Paul presents himself in these two passages as the missionary, as the one who proclaims the gospel *despite and whilst* suffering. He is the one who speaks to the gentiles even though his own compatriots oppose him with violence (cf. also 2:14-16). The Thessalonians were acquainted with his mission in such difficult circumstances. Later on in the letter, Paul once again brings to memory that he actually *foretold* them that they would also suffer in this way (3:4), adding, once again, “as you know.” A particular model of mission is thus reiterated and linked explicitly with their awareness.

The reference to their insight in a particular model of mission is not merely an insignificant side remark. Paul wants to underscore their awareness of how powerfully the missionary work of the Pauline team was among them, despite and in suffering, thus reminding them of the fundamental role of mission and focusing their minds on the issue that is to him of prime importance in their own situation and in the life of the church. Their knowledge of the apostolic mission with its salvific consequences, noted at the end of 5, offers the occasion for Paul to digress in order to speak in more detail about their imitation of his apostolic mission.⁷ What they have perceived in the Pauline mission, they imitated as a model for and in their own lives. Paul, in his involved writing,⁸ does not argue in distant and empty logical phrases and sentences. It is, therefore, as Roosen (1971:38) indicates, not a passive imitation. They actively and consciously work to become like the apostles in reaching out with the gospel to others. The word of the Lord sounds out *through* them. In a further intensification, Paul then adds that they ultimately emulate the suffering, witnessing Christ. The

5 Haufe (1999:26) also notes the link and points out that the remark is kept short here in preparation of what is to be explained in more detail there.

6 The importance of this motif is illustrated by the discussion in Verhoef (1995:17).

7 This would be in line with what happened previously: a section is continued with an embedment that follows immediately after it (e.g. verse 5 as an embedment of the statement on the election).

8 Von Dobschütz (1909:72): “einen anderen Gedanken seines übervollen Herzens.”

Lord is model next to Paul.⁹ They become like the Lord who reaches out to humanity despite the suffering that is involved. The argument retains its climactic build-up: their imitation is so much more praiseworthy because they are emulating the Lord — not only the apostles.

Or to put it differently, the reality and existence of the missionary preacher is an essential part of the proclamation of the gospel. In accepting, and, therefore, in proclaiming the gospel, the image of a witnessing believer is presented as model of what faith implies and means. To believe is to witness actively and all over the place (1:8). This is true for Paul and his companions; it is no less true for the Thessalonians. Their proclamation of the gospel thus belongs to the good news itself. In sum, these remarks reflect a basic conviction that the Thessalonians participated in Paul's ongoing mission after their conversion because it was assumed that conversion sets the convert on the journey of proclaiming the gospel.¹⁰ It is against this background that the following remarks about the missionary activities of the Thessalonians need to be analysed.

4. PROCLAIMING THE WORD OF THE LORD.

Paul, having noted how the Thessalonians have become an example for all the believers in Macedonia and Asia, explains their exemplary behaviour in verse 8 with a *γάρ*. Carefully he repeats the geographical locations of the previous verse: *from them* the word of the Lord sounded forth in Macedonia and Achaia. The focus is on their participation and action by placing the prepositional phrase in the phrase initial position. It will be repeated in the second part of this verse in the reference to their faith that went out. They are actively involved in mission.

Not everyone accepts that the notion of the word of the Lord, reverberating in these locations, refers to missionary activities by the Thessalonians (e.g. Roosen 1971:40¹¹). The issue is complicated by the obscurity in this

9 Thus Morris (1959:60-61), but more convincingly Roosen (1971:37-38), who notes that more than their obedience is suggested. They accept the word, even though, like Christ, it involves suffering. Cf. also Malherbe (2000:115).

10 Cf. the discussion in Collins (1984:61).

11 Roosen (1971:40) argues for a realistic witnessing power inherent in their conversion. The reports about their new faith brought about a deepening of the faith of believers or a conversion from non-believers. Roosen 1971:41:

De zendelingen hoeven in het geheel niet te spreken, want de apostolische arbeid wordt hen als het ware uit de hand genomen door het overal missionerend geloof van de Tessalonicenzen.

passage. Verse 8 has not always been so clear to commentators. They point out that, despite the fact that the phrase “not only... but also” points to the unity in this passage, both the subject and verb change (the word of the Lord has sounded forth/your faith has gone out),” obfuscating the argument.¹²

In addition, the nature and meaning of the verbs are controversial. Meeks (1983:27), for example, denying the involvement of the Thessalonians in active mission, argues that 1:8b-10 is about *people in the other places* “that are able to describe Paul’s arrival in Thessalonica and the conversion that follows” (secondary italics).¹³ Reports about the radical conversion of the Thessalonians impressed many people. This means one should translate the sentence as meaning that the word of the Lord sounded forth “from” (ἀφ’ ὑμῶν), not “through” them. Frame (1946:85) translates the phrase as “Starting from you, the word of the Lord... has sounded forth.” He notes that it may simply mean that the word “has spread.” In other words, the conversion of the Thessalonians has become the object of repeated reports to Paul. In line with this, “faith in the Lord” in verse 9, furthermore, is explained as repentance rather than as a witnessing mission. According to this view, this exegetical analysis is underscored by the historical observation that there are no references somewhere to active missionaries from Thessalonica.

This interpretation is not convincing. That there is no reference to Thessalonian missionaries is an *argumentum e silentio*. Malherbe (2000:116-7; referring to BDF 210.2) pointed out that the two prepositions in the phrase are often interchanged, so that nothing can be brought in against the reading “through” them. More importantly is the Greek verb ἐξήχηται that is used to express the sounding forth of the word of the Lord in 1:8. It is a *hapax legomenon*, ἤχεῖν, meaning that the word sounded out from them as the centre of power (Van Leeuwen 1926:308). On this point, it is of special significance to note the chiasm in verse 8 that Roosen (1971:39) pointed out (thereby also confirming the coherence of this difficult passage). Once the chiasm is identified, the verse is clear. The two elements in the initial and ultimate positions (a..a) are mutually determinative. The ἐξελήλυθεν clearly interprets ἐξήχηται as the active participation of the Thessalonians in the Pauline mission. The Thessalonians imitating the Pauline mission-

12 Frame (1946:84) mentions another problem:

The obscurity lies in the fact that v.8... explains not solely why the readers became “a model to all Christians in Greece”, but also why they became a pattern to believers everywhere.

13 The question is who these people in other places were. Meeks refers to 2 Corinthians 11:9 and Philippians 4:15f. for more information on them.

aries by reaching out with the gospel to unbelievers,¹⁴ follow the model of their founding father's missionary activities (cf. also Malherbe 2000:130). Paul intensifies his thoughts, though, repeating how the word of the Lord went out, not only in Macedonia and Asia, but also in every place.

It is one of the striking aspects of this early letter that it refers to a ministry of the believers of the city far beyond their borders, reflecting an actively witnessing community inspiring others with their message in neighbouring areas (1 Thes. 1:7-8). Malherbe (2000:130) writes:

[T]he notice that the Thessalonian evangelism had extended beyond their city, to Macedonia and even Achaia, during the few months of the church's existence is remarkable.

We know from the Pauline letters how sensitive Paul was to moving on with the gospel to new locations (e.g. Rom. 15:24, 28; Gal. 1:18, 23, 2:9). This geographical consciousness consistently characterises his mission. The geographical locations mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 1:8 creates the impression that the believers there came to share these sensitivities. They have proclaimed the gospel at home and in the neighbouring areas, but they are also reaching out to other places. It is confirmed by the fact that in this chiasmic pattern, the emphasis is on the location in which they proclaim (C).

These words have special significance in the light of the strategic location of Thessalonica as a city. It was a key city, situated on the Via Egnatia with an important harbour. Commercial links brought in many workers and facilitated travel. Consequently, there were many opportunities to witness, not only locally, but also along the route (cf. De Villiers 2002). In this way the remark of Paul makes much sense.

Of special interest in the chiasm, though, is to note how the "word of the Lord" is replaced and, by implication, interpreted by "your faith in God." It widens the notion of mission in a remarkable and uniquely Pauline manner. Their "faith" is a witness to others. This remark now needs more attention.

5. MISSION BY PAULINE COMMUNITIES

Missionary aspects of Paul's letters are not always as eagerly studied as theological or historical matters. In a recent volume on Paul's mission (Bolt & Thompson 2000), there are few references to the missionary influence of

¹⁴ In their imitation of the apostles, the Thessalonians have become an example for believers, that is, both those that are already Christians as well as those who are about to believe (Roosen 1971:62).

Paul on his churches and the missionary activities by converts. 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 is not even mentioned once in that volume.

One possible reason for this neglect of missionary perspectives may be because of the anachronistic concept of mission that is often operative in readings of Biblical texts. Mission is, as 1 Thessalonians 1 proves, much more than merely the act of proclaiming the gospel to an unconverted audience so prevalent in the life and activities of contemporary churches. In an essay on maturity as the goal of the Pauline mission, Peterson (2000:185) pointed out that Paul's intention with his mission was not only primary evangelism, but also "to establish his converts in the way of Christian maturity."¹⁵ Romans 1:5, 15:16-21, and 16:26 are good examples of how the obedience of the faith is spelled out as the aim of gentile mission.

It is this understanding of mission that explains the remarks in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8. The Thessalonians are witnessing not only by converting people in mission, that is, "sounding forth" the word of the Lord, but also through their dynamic, growing, persevering and outgoing faith, that is, making their faith to become known in every place (1:8). Their witnessing is part of a wider, comprehensive lifestyle. Paul writes to confirm this program of witnessing, commending them for following the example of his own work and of the Lord. That is why Paul is grateful when Timothy returns with positive news about the faith *and* love of the Thessalonians (3:6), clearly preparing his later compliment for their love to "all" believers in the "whole" of Macedonia (4:10). This explains why his remarks about their activities in Macedonia, Achaia and every place follow his observations about their Christian qualities in the preceding verses.

This is also why he adds so many moral injunctions later on in the letter. Of seminal importance in this regard is 1 Thessalonians 4, where he refers to how they ought to live (4:1) and their sanctification (4:3 and 8). There is a close link between witnessing and the one who witnesses. The witness of the church thus comprises not only proclamation, but also the one who proclaims the word. This is true from the very beginning of the conversion events. Gaventa (1998:18) observes about 7-9a:

The Thessalonians may have been recipients of the gospel, but they were by no means merely passive recipients. Even the way in which they received the gospel has itself become a proclamation.

15 He notes (2000:197) how maturity is closely linked to the right attitude of mind that will evoke and determine mature behaviour. Cf. also Colossians 1:25ff. In Philippians 3:17 Paul, in an eschatological context about the heavenly citizenship of believers, calls on the believers to become his followers in striving for spiritual growth and maturity.

Their activity should not be restricted to the exemplary only, though, as if they witness through who they are rather than through what they do. It is not their faith that is the ultimate aim of mission, but it is in the maturity of their faith and in the action to which their faith brings them, that mission is served. The portrayal of the Thessalonians is thus fits into a wider picture.

Missionary activity of Pauline communities was part of their daily existence. In Romans 1:8, Paul writes to the believers that ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καταγγέλεται ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ. In the introduction to the letter Paul indicates that he wanted to visit believers in Rome to proclaim the gospel to them (1:15). If proclaiming the gospel implies that the audience is gentile, this implies that Paul wanted to evangelise the unconverted in that city, as some suggested (Peterson 2000:188). The trend of the chapter, and of the letter, however, suggests that this is not the case. To proclaim the gospel encompasses both evangelism among the unconverted *and* leading the converted to greater maturity (Peterson 2000:188). The intense theological debate in Romans illustrates what mission is about and how Paul conceived the “faith” of the Roman believers. The letter is intended to enlist their aid in the ongoing mission of Paul in Spain (15:24, 28). Their faith, celebrated across the world, implies that they will make them available for and partake in a seminal new mission.¹⁶

6. CONCLUSION

The above analysis indicates how converts of the Pauline mission emulated the example of those who proclaimed the gospel to them. They transcended their own situation of suffering, like the apostles, proclaiming the gospel despite these negative experiences.¹⁷ This was indeed a hallmark of the early church in general, as is, for example clear from the Lukan portrayal of be-

16 Note furthermore that the thanksgiving in Philippians expresses Paul’s appreciation for the missionary work of his addressees that includes financial support (4:10) and the sending out of aides (e.g. Epaphroditus, cf. 2:25). Many, including Clement, Eudia and Sintiche, were co-workers in the Pauline mission (4:1-3). They all are taken up in the larger team lead by Paul. Also here faith means to be actively involved in mission.

17 Gentiles who joined the Christian movement were mostly required to distance themselves from their syncretistic religious background, leading in many cases to social ostracising. Linked with strong Jewish opposition in many locations, the situation of believers was almost as a rule difficult. To continue witnessing in such a context was not easy.

lievers in Jerusalem in the post-Pentecostal era. In Pauline missions recently converted Christians were expected to become part of a wider missionary movement. Meeks (1983:9-10) wrote that Paul planted

small cells of Christians in scattered households in some of the strategically located cities of the northeast Mediterranean basin. Those cells were linked to one another and to Paul and his fellow workers by means of letters and official visits and by frequent contact through travelling Christians, and *be encouraged local persons of promise to establish new groups in nearby towns.*

1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 reflects this focus in the Pauline missions.

Paul wrote his letter to the Thessalonians to urge them to continue their witness of the gospel in a difficult situation. What they were doing in Thessalonica, having turned away from the false idols to serve the living God, awaiting the return of the Son of God, and witnessing to all in doing so, had to be continued at all costs. Gaventa (1998:16) noted:

Paul is not merely reporting on past events, as if he were writing an account for the daily news. His celebratory recollection of the behavior of the Thessalonians serves to encourage and reinforce similar behavior in the future.

And, in similar vein, Haufe (1999:30) observes aptly:

Paulus und seine beiden Mitarbeiter benutzen den ersten Teil der üblichen Danksagung, um den Christen von Thessalonich einleitend zu versichern, wie sehr sie auf dem Hintergrund einer geistesmächtigen Missionspredigt mit ihrer Bekehrung und ihrem aktiven Christsein auf dem rechten Wege und innerhalb weniger Monate zum "ökumenischen Vorbild" geworden sind. Diese anerkennenden Worte sollen die Leser gerade angesichts der erheblichen Spannungen ermutigen und ihre Aufmerksamkeit für die folgenden Ausführungen wecken.

Paul's comments about the missionary work of the Thessalonians also serve to underscore the need for their continuing spiritual growth. He wanted them to keep in mind what influence they had on those on the outside world through their personal behaviour. This would explain the moral injunctions in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 better: an upright moral life would strengthen and support the Thessalonians in their witness to their gentile neighbours (cf. explicitly in 1 Thess. 4:12).

From these remarks it is clear that the Pauline mission had a much more corporate nature than is generally thought. From the earliest times, Paul was part of a larger missionary team that also included the churches of

his converts.¹⁸ The earliest letter of Paul confirms the general thrust of Luke's picture, revealing how groups of missionaries were involved in the origins and ongoing existence of believers in Thessalonica, but also involved them in the ongoing task of proclaiming the gospel.¹⁹

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- 18 From Acts we learn that he was integrated in this structure through his involvement in the Christian community in Antioch, as the fascinating report in Acts 11:19-30 so clearly spells out. Compared with the isolation of some groups in Judea, this openness is striking and deserves further research. Paul's mission is therefore part of an older and wider tradition of proclaiming the gospel.
- 19 Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:27. Note, how, in a recent publication on Paul as letter writer, Stirewalt (2003) spelled out some fascinating insights in the implications of Paul's ministry through letters, mooting the corporate nature of Pauline mission from a different perspective. Arguing that Paul's logistics for his letter writing were modeled on the official letter setting, he notes, for example, how Paul was supported by a staff of volunteers who helped formulate, write or deliver his letters (Stirewalt 2003:19):

He relied on people who shared his work and therefore had an investment in the communications necessitated by his circuit-riding ministry.

Everything depended, though, on the reception of the letters:

The planning and purpose of logistics are completed by the letter's reception; preparation and dispatch are directed to this end. Paul's letters were received by the officers and people of an ecclesia, an organized body. Oral reading and additional oral messages publicized and confirmed the message but also transmitted the sender's apostolic authority and made the recipients responsible for observing the directives contained in the letter.

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Keywords

1 Thessalonians 1:6-8

New Testament Exegesis

Pauline Mission

Trefwoorden

1 Tessalonissense 1:6-8

Nuwe-Testamentiese eksegesis

Pauliniese sending