

**~Other Speakers G-L: Aaron Hills:**

The Apostle Paul is the wisest interpreter and expounder of the gospel of Christ that the ages have produced. It becomes supremely important to learn what he thought of the Pentecostal experience. Did he believe in a distinct, epochal spiritual experience, subsequent to regeneration, and quite as marked in its influence upon the soul?

A goodly number of wise theologians believe that he did. Andrew Murray says: "To the disciples the baptism with the Spirit was very distinctly NOT His first bestowal for regeneration." Dr. Watson, a prince among Methodist theologians, says: "We have already spoken of justification, adoption, regeneration and the witness of the Spirit, and we proceed to another as distinctly marked and as graciously promised in the Holy Scriptures. This is entire sanctification, or holiness."

Theologians ought not to write so unless the Apostle Paul taught it. For we may be sure that if there was a desired and required second experience Paul would certainly have found it out, and would have told the churches about it. Did he do it? And if so, what estimate did he put upon its importance?

We will let the apostle himself decide the matter, as he writes the First Epistle to the Thessalonians.

In the first chapter he makes it absolutely certain that he was writing to Christians, as follows:

1. He wrote his epistle "unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ." It was not fashionable to be a church member in those days. Nobody would join the church who did not have religion enough to forsake the world and heathenism and endure persecution for Jesus' sake. We may be sure these persons were Christians, or they would never have abandoned the religion of their country and their fathers to belong to a church "in the Lord Jesus Christ."

2. Paul says, "We give thanks to God always for you all." Who can believe that this apostle was thanking God always for a mob of sinners?

If he was thanking God for sinners, he certainly had many to be thankful for, as the heathen world was full of them. But that is unthinkable. He was thanking God for them because they were Christians.

3. He remembered "without ceasing" their "work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." Here were believers who had the three cardinal Christian graces -- faith, hope, and love -- walking with God in an earnest, laborious, patient spirit. They were manifestly Christians.

4. He called them "brethren beloved of God" (1:4, margin). This phrase is never in the New Testament applied to sinners.

5. He said he knew their election. People are not elected who are not candidates. Had they been sinners in the "gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity," it would never have occurred to Paul that they were elected.

6. "And," he says, "ye became imitators of us, and of the Lord" (1:6, A.S.V.). Who ever saw a large company of sinners picking out the best man on earth and the Lord Jesus himself to imitate?

7. They "received the word . . . with joy of the Holy Ghost." In all my work as a minister these thirty years, I have never seen a company of sinners who got any joy from the Holy Ghost. He brings joy and comfort to true believers; but He brings only awful conviction -- the pangs of hell -- to unbelievers or sinners.

8. These Thessalonians became "ensamples to all that believe." If sinners, they must have been a choice variety, such as I have never seen! A good example to all the believers in a whole province!

9. They "sounded out the word of the Lord . . . in every place your faith to God-ward is spread around." They had a real, vital faith, not in themselves, but in God; and they had preached Christ so earnestly that everybody knew where they stood and in whom they believed. This does not indicate that they were weak Christians, much less unregenerate sinners.

10. Paul says: "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." No better description of a genuine conversion could be asked for. They had actually forsaken the idols of sin, and quit the sin business, to "serve

the living and true God." The God of mercy and grace requires no more as a condition of sonship.

11. They waited "for his Son from heaven." Nobody has ever yet found a large company of sinners on this earth lovingly on the lookout for Jesus to come from heaven. It is the last conceivable thing that sinners would desire. Paul wrote to these same church members that the Lord Jesus would be revealed from heaven, "with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus." No, indeed! Sinners are not waiting for, and joyfully anticipating, Jesus to come from heaven. They do not want Him to come. They would prevent His coming and drive Him out of the universe if they could.

But these excellent Thessalonian Christians, full of faith and hope and love, earnest in life, imitating Paul and Jesus, were waiting for their Lord from heaven. If these people were not converted, regenerated, justified disciples of Christ, human language would fail to describe such. A church filled with such Christians would today be esteemed unusually spiritual, and its praise would be on all lips.

But did the apostle urge upon such Christians a second work of grace, after such a radical regeneration? He certainly did.

1. In the second chapter he assured them that he and Timothy had more than the experience of justification. "Ye are witnesses and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe" (v.10). In other words, they had the experience of sanctification.

2. In the third chapter, tenth and thirteenth verses, he writes them that he is "night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith . . . to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness." In other words, their faith had laid hold of Christ only for justification; he now wished them to perfect their faith by receiving the Pentecostal experience, the baptism of the Holy Ghost for sanctification, "to the end" they might live a holy and unblamable life, as he and Timothy were living.

And the apostle felt that this second experience was so supremely important that it was the object of his prayers night and day. He knew that nothing short of the Pentecostal experience would give them the stability and steadfastness in the Lord that he coveted for them. Nothing but the crucifixion of the carnal mind would render those believers "unblameable in holiness," and wholly pleasing to the Lord. And so he prayed for them exceedingly, and urged them on to the second work of grace.