

## A CONSIDERATION OF THE THEME OF REPUTATION in 1 and 2 THESSALONIANS

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Even though the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians have been somewhat neglected compared to other Pauline compositions,<sup>1</sup> there seems to be no end to the secondary literature which has grown up around them. No detail of these missives has escaped the microscopically precise analysis of NT scholars. Indeed entire monographs and anthologies have sprouted from small sections such as 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.1-12. Not occasionally such well intentioned scrutiny can lead to myopia, and that has perhaps been the case with the Gordian knot of the aforementioned passage. The antidote to myopia, of course, is the occasional panoramic view, and in this particular article, I would like to explore the neglected macro-theme of reputation which Paul has conscientiously woven through these two epistles.

In addressing reputation, necessity demands the defining of terms. For our purposes, we will consider reputation to encompass the social status, honor, and esteem that a community attributes to individuals or groups. Obviously, this nice conscience definition raises more questions than it answers. Status, honor, and esteem do not represent objectively referential concepts. Societies fill each of these terms with the content to which their histories, traditions, and developmental paths have led them. However, this process of filling terms really lies at the heart of Paul's rationale for spending time and effort on reputation at

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1 I am assuming Pauline authorship for both epistles. Almost no one will object in the case of 1 Th., and in the case of 2 Th., the point does not need more defense than that which many scholars have already provided. Nonetheless, Colin Nicholl has provided the most recent and complete defense available (Colin Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, SNTSMS, no. 126 [Cambridge: CUP, 2004], 208, et passim.).

all. He intends to keep showing the Thessalonians that becoming Christians has resulted in a refilling of concepts like status, honor, and esteem with new content. However, in order to appreciate this new wine, we will first need to consider the old wine of reputation in the first-century Greco-Roman world. Then, we will need to examine the social and historical setting in which reputation came to the forefront in Thessalonica. And finally with these pieces in place, we will possess the contrast necessary to comprehend Paul's treatment of reputation in these letters.

#### REPUTATION IN THE FIRST-CENTURY GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

Perhaps no statement captures the ancient Greco-Roman ideal of reputation better than the oft cited line penned by the ancient Athenian poet and statesman Solon: “πρὸς πάντων ανθρώπων ἀεὶ δόξαν ἔχειν γαθήν.”<sup>2</sup> The poet prays that he might always have a “good reputation before all men,” and his wish typifies a cardinal and enduring value in ancient Greek as well as Roman culture. Within this value system, Pericles can appeal to reputation as a strong motivation for the beleaguered Athenians to press on in the face of tragedy and loss,<sup>3</sup> and Tacitus willingly concedes the normalcy of men being absolutely bent on getting a good reputation.<sup>4</sup> Plutarch tells the story of an Indian archer who had a reputation for being the best, and when Alexander the Great commanded him to demonstrate his skill, he refused. Alexander was about to execute him until he learned the reason

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2 Solon, 13.4.

3 Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.61.2-4. For more on the importance of the reputation of both Athens and its citizens in ancient political rhetoric similar to the above passage from Thucydides see Demosthenes, *Third Philippic*, passim.

4 Tacitus, *Histories*, 4.6.1; Tacitus, *Annals*, 14.49.3; In his analysis of Tacitus' Agricola and martyrdom, Sailor sees Tacitus presenting the “self-evident goal of a man's life” as “public esteem” (Dylan Sailor, *Writing and Empire in Tacitus* [New York: CUP, 2008], 18). Cf. Tacitus, *Agricola*, 42.4. Contra Plutarch who believes that one should neither pursue or avoid reputation (Plutarch, *On Praising Oneself*, 777E-F). However, it should be noted that Plutarch too admits that especially young men have a kind of unquenchable thirst for reputation (Plutarch, *Should Old Men Take Part in the Affairs of the State?*, 793D).

for his insubordination. Apparently the archer had not been practicing, and he would rather die than lose his reputation for being the best. Alexander understood all too well, and spared the man's life.<sup>5</sup>

In light of the ancient sources, modern students of the first-century Greco-Roman world agree on the paramount importance of reputation in that society. Malina roots this tendency in the visceral male drive to dominate. He argues that men of this era viewed their own honor and masculinity and that of others in direct relationship to one's willingness to defend reputation.<sup>6</sup> So, in a real sense to lose reputation was tantamount to emasculation. Indeed, many scholars would argue that one of the worst things that could possibly happen to a denizen of this ancient world would be having one's reputation publicly damaged.<sup>7</sup> The more reputation at stake the more there was to lose. This was particularly true of political men for whom "reputation...counted for practically everything."<sup>8</sup> So, laws protected patrons, parents, city magistrates, and priests from court cases. In this way, low status people with an ax to grind could not easily damage the reputation of a high status person.<sup>9</sup> The impulse to protect reputation pervaded every sphere of life. Even at play, whether it be in the symposium or telling dirty jokes, the Greeks in particular took pains to protect reputation whether through their drinking rules or laws that limited the extent of free speech.<sup>10</sup>

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5 Plutarch, *Sayings of Kings and Commanders*, 181b.

6 Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Rev. ed. (Louisville: W/JKP, 1993), 49.

7 Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–6*, AGJU, no. 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 8, 95; Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians*, WUNT 2, no. 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 69.

8 Sarah B. Pomeroy, Stanley M. Burstein, Walter Donal, and Jennifer T. Roberts, *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 299.

9 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 64–65.

10 Steven Halliwell, *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 115, 242, 318.

Clearly it is hard to overstate the importance of reputation,<sup>11</sup> and this subject cannot be explored and categorized adequately here. Nonetheless, I would like to sketch briefly what made for a good reputation and what made for a bad reputation in Greco-Roman society at the time Paul wrote. The apostle's contemporaries secured good reputations through actions, states, and moral qualities. Acumen in public speech through command of the rhetorical arts assured that a gifted orator would enjoy a good reputation.<sup>12</sup> Likewise writing history could have the same effect,<sup>13</sup> and in a similar vein, even the artisan could come by the acclaim of reputation through the excellence of his work.<sup>14</sup> Also the simple act of extending hospitality to travelers led to a good reputation.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, some did find reputation through more spectacular means such as through military exploits<sup>16</sup> and building cities and monuments.<sup>17</sup> For Plato, however, the most important sort of reputation came through performing acts of justice.<sup>18</sup> Beyond actions, certain states carried with them elevated status in the form of an enhanced reputation, e.g., sobriety,<sup>19</sup> nobility of birth<sup>20</sup>, good looks,<sup>21</sup>

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11 Of course the Cynics who did purportedly did not care one bit about reputation are perhaps an exception to this rule (cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 6.93). Nonetheless, one could also argue that the Cynics were seeking reputation just as much as anyone else; they had simply moved the goal posts and had changed the definition of "a good reputation" dramatically. Whatever the case may be; our description holds as a reasonably accurate stereotype.

12 Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio- Claudian Movement*, 2nd edn. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 83, 147, 168; Steve Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle: The portrait of Paul in the Miletus Speech and 1 Thessalonians*, SNTSMS, no.108 (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 156.

13 Sallust, *The Conspiracy of Catiline*, 3.1-2.

14 Plato, *The Republic*, 345E2-3.

15 Polybius, *The Histories*, 4.20; Marshall, *Enmity*, 6.

16 J. E. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 37, et passim.

17 Seutonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, 243.

18 Plato, *The Republic*, 589c1-3.

19 Philo, *Sobriety*, 1.3.

20 Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.13.1.

and wealth.<sup>22</sup> To these we can also add certain moral qualities like wisdom,<sup>23</sup> goodness,<sup>24</sup> autonomy,<sup>25</sup> and seriousness.<sup>26</sup>

On the flip side of reputation lay poverty, greed, and unworthy speech. And all of these were inimical to a good reputation. If wealth procures good repute, then it should come as no surprise that its opposite comes with a concomitant lack of honor. However, one must be careful to note that although wealth brings reputation and dearth destroys reputation, it is *not* the act of growing or gaining wealth that bolsters esteem. Indeed, those who make it their aim to become wealthy often fall into the trap of greed, and the greedy do not receive high marks in the category of reputation. Accordingly, we learn from Tacitus that Nero's freedman, Patrobius, gained a bad reputation for his greed.<sup>27</sup> The rich man of note earns his status not by gaining wealth but by spending it. He invests in clients duty-bound to work for the glory of his name; he extends hospitality; he paves roads, builds buildings, and funds feasts.<sup>28</sup> In short, the ancients esteemed reputation as just about the only thing worth spending money to buy.

Just as poverty and greed diminished public standing, so also could unworthy speech. Derision in particular could damage reputation even more effectively than an inglorious death.<sup>29</sup> If contemptuous ridicule went unanswered, the victim would become a laughing-stock bereft of

21 Ibid.

22 Sanger, Dieter, "Die δυνάτοι in 1 Kor 1.26" *ZNW* 76 (1985): 285–91.

23 Clarke, *Leadership*, 113.

24 Plutarch, *On Envy and Hate*, 538D.

25 Sailor, *Writing*, 292.

26 Halliwell, *Laughter*, 115.

27 Tacitus, *The Histories*, 2.95. Cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 1.5.1-6, 2.6.19; Plato, *The Republic*, 1.349-50, 362; Aristotle, *Politics*, 2.4.11-12; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 5.2.2, 5.9.9, 9.8.4-5; Polybius, *The Histories*, 6.56.

28 K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 122; Douglas Oakman, "The Ancient Economy," in *The Social Context of the New Testament*, ed. Derek Tidball (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 149.

29 Euripides, *Hercules Furens*, 285-286.

reputation.<sup>30</sup> Slanders and character defamation could also have a devastating effect on one's status within the community. Therefore, in an effort to mitigate reputation damage, the Athenians restricted free speech by outlawing slander and defamation.<sup>31</sup> It also seems that the speech and behavior of one's friends could negatively impact reputation, and Cicero, therefore, warns his readers to choose friends wisely. He says that one must be careful to choose comrades who will protect one's reputation because ultimately he views each individual as responsible for both himself and his friends.<sup>32</sup> Beyond the speech of others, one's own speech could also imprecate personal honor. This was particularly so for those who made it their business to report the misdeeds of others—becoming tattletales in the process.<sup>33</sup>

#### REPUTATION in THESSALONICA

In recent years the social-sciences have shed new light on the situation in Thessalonica. This has especially been true in terms of understanding the highly apocalyptic nature of these letters and the obvious social strife that they reveal. A good case can be made that the apocalyptic elements attest to a disenfranchised community. In other words, those who embrace an apocalyptic world-view do so because they feel disconnected from this-worldly social structures. In Thessalonica, new Roman immigrants had displaced the older elite Greek families, and the once powerful found themselves on the outside of the political power structures. Additionally, the dominant religion, i.e., the Cabirus cult, had been absorbed into emperor worship and had simultaneously become an elite and Roman religion—leaving many disaffected former adherents.<sup>34</sup> Thus Paul came to town at just the right moment preaching a gospel of belonging to a new family and a new

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30 Halliwell, *Laughter*, 26.

31 *Ibid.*, 318.

32 Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 2.2.28. (Most scholars no longer attribute this work to the hand of Cicero.)

33 Plutarch, *On Curiosity*, 16.

34 Karl P. Donfried, *Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 25-28; Charles A. Wannamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIGNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 4-6; Ben Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 5-6.

kingdom just when people were feeling spiritually and socially homeless.

However, as the extant letters make all too clear, new loyalties resulted in conflict. The fledgling church, composed primarily of gentiles, quickly found themselves at odds with friends, family, and empire. They had broken away from normal social intercourse with friends in socio-religious contexts, traded their loyalty to their birth families for a commitment to the church, and become subjects of God's kingdom rather than Caesar's.<sup>35</sup> Todd Still has helped to explain the dynamics of this reality in terms of conflict and deviance models. Regarding the nature of the harassment faced by the church, Still writes: "I would contend, then, that it is best to regard the Thessalonians' affliction to which Paul repeatedly refers as external (i.e. observable, verifiable), non-Christian opposition which took the forms of verbal harassment, social ostracism, political sanctions and perhaps even some sort of physical abuse, which on the rarest of occasions may have resulted in martyrdom."<sup>36</sup> Paul himself could not escape the tribulations which afflicted the Thessalonians. As chapter 2 of 1 Th. reveals, some had undertaken to besmirch Paul's reputation by slandering him and leveling accusations of greed and profiteering against him. Still has well demonstrated that the good relationship which Paul enjoyed with this church and its internal stability preclude the possibility that this onslaught came from the inside.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, Paul himself had endured the same treatment from the same enemies as everyone else.

If the above snapshot of some of the social forces at work in Thessalonica has merit, then no one can deny the manifest importance of reputation here. The reputation and honor of those with political aspirations had become worthless since their ouster from the system. Their birth status had become null. Their opportunity for military

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35 Many have heard a note of subversion in Paul's attitude towards Rome in these letters, and Paul's use of the imperial slogan, "Eivrh,nh kai. avsfaleia," in 1 Th. 5.3 seems to seal the case. Here, he implicitly uses a Roman boast to presage the fall and utter ruin of the empire. Importantly, Paul has been saying these things in a city desperate to maintain good standing with Rome.

36 Todd D. Still, *Conflict at Thessalonica: A Pauline Church and its Neighbours*, JSNTSup, no. 183 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 217.

37 *Ibid.*, 148.

exploits of repute had evaporated as their loyalty had come under doubt, and they now faced reputation assassination brought about by the derision of their neighbors. In short, every opportunity to purchase reputation through deeds and even money itself had dissolved when the church found itself being crushed under the *de facto* label of “deviants.” And even their apostle and teacher found his reputation waning under derisive and slanderous speech peppered with accusations of greed!

#### REPUTATION in 1 and 2 THESSALONIANS

Before looking at how the subject of reputation unfolds in Paul's correspondence to the church in Thessalonica, we need to take a look at the word δόξα. New Testament scholars, under the influence of Gerhard Kittel, often adopt the facile assumption that δόξα means something different in the NT than it means everywhere else. In normal Greek usage δόξα refers to the opinions that others have of one, repute, and the honor and glory that come with reputation.<sup>38</sup> Although Kittel freely admits the usual meaning of reputation and renown, he claims that the word takes on a new religious sense in the NT and admits only a few exceptions where the sense of “repute” remains intact. In the NT, Kittel believes that it primarily expresses the “divine mode of being.”<sup>39</sup> Undoubtedly, the NT does employ this specialized use, but as Nolland demonstrates even when the numinous glory of God takes center stage, reputation can concurrently be the chief sense of “glory.”<sup>40</sup> And in Thessalonians we have the most thoroughly Greek documents in the NT. In them, Paul never mentions the OT; he spotlights the former idolatry of his congregation, and he employs a very Greek hortatory style.<sup>41</sup> If any NT audience would have thought of δόξα in the ordinary sense of “reputation,” it would have been the Thessalonians.

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38 LSJ, 444.

39 Gerhard Kittel, δόξα, *TDNT*, 2.232-253. Cf. Mounce who sees δόξα in terms of “God's radiant power” in the NT (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC, no. 46 [Nashville: Nelson, 2000], 43).

40 John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, WBC, no. 35A (Waco: Word, 1989), 108.

41 Abraham J. Malherbe, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ABC, no. 32B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 56-58.



*Reputation Re-framed 1 Th. 1.7-2.20*

Reputation comes to the forefront from the very beginning. In 1 Th. 1.7, we learn that the manner in which the Thessalonians had received the gospel in the midst of hardship had made them an example (τύπον) to the believers in both Macedonia and Achaia. Their willingness to stay put and face the wrath of their neighbors and the social death brought by Christian commitment made them models worth emulating.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, verse 8 clearly indicates that their reputation had taken on a life of its own; so that Paul found their renown having preceded him wherever he traveled. So, after boldly and consciously choosing to cut off all possibilities for gaining reputation and honor at home, the Thessalonians attained a reputation far beyond anything previously available to them. And although disconnected from normal paths of gaining reputation, Paul begins his letter by showing them that they had gained one anyway: this not through birth, speech, wealth, politics or the like, but simply by embracing the gospel in spite of extreme pressure to abandon it.

After giving more details about what sort of Gospel they had received, Paul turns to the manner in which he had brought it to them. If the Thessalonians had suffered and made sacrifices in receiving the gospel, no less was true of Paul who had preached it. Chapter 2 begins by detailing the hardships the apostle had faced including coming from Philippi into the hostile city of Thessalonica with fresh whip marks on his back (1 Th. 2.2) yet preaching boldly. And as we have previously discussed, he endured slanderous and derisive speech from the non-Christian residents of Thessalonica which would have sounded the death knell to any glimmer of reputation and status in the Greco-Roman world (1 Th. 2.3). In fact Paul refused to tone down the gospel with flattery simply to preserve his own reputation and status or to enhance his wealth (1 Th. 2.5). Finally (vs. 6), Paul boldly declares that he did not seek after reputation<sup>43</sup> (δόξαν) from those in the church or any one else. In the verses that follow, he explains his willingness to leave aside authority, status, financial support, and essentially all marks of reputation for the sake of planting the gospel firmly in Thessalonica (1

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42 Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 44.

43 Malherbe notes the meaning of “reputation” in this case. He believes that Paul here asserts his intention to conduct ministry in a manner worthy of God (Malherbe, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 143).

Th. 2.7-9). But there is a hint that Paul had not forsaken completely outside opinion. Although he had abandoned any notion of pleasing men, he had fully devoted himself to being a person approved by God (1 Th. 2.4).

This passage reveals that both Paul and the Thessalonians had abandoned the reputation rat race, but in the Thessalonians reputation for belief and endurance and Paul's pursuit of a God-pleasing, God-approved life, we find shimmering in the background a truth that only becomes lucid in 1 Th. 2.12. Paul caps the whole thing—their belief, his preaching, their mutual suffering—with a purpose/result clause: εἰς τὸ περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλείαν καὶ δόξαν. All of it had the goal and result of the Thessalonians living a life worthy of God who had called them for his kingdom and “glory.” Perhaps Paul means that God has called the Thessalonians for a divine mode of existence,<sup>44</sup> but the immediate context strongly suggests “reputation.” Interestingly, in this context, reputation does not come through any of the normal actions, states, or moral qualities. God has his own kind of reputation for the Thessalonians. One gets this reputation without trying to do anything but obey the call; it is a reputation sourced in God. And this is precisely what the Thessalonians have experienced as word of their steadfast resolution to obey the gospel call rang out far and wide.

Just like his church, Paul who eschewed reputation—choosing instead to answer the apostolic call, ends up receiving a reputation after all. Indeed, we finally learn that he looks forward to the *parousia* at which time he expects to have both a boast and a reputation. However, like his congregation, his boast and reputation lie far outside the normal actions, states, and moral qualities. On that day, his reputation will consist of people. Verse 20 concludes the chapter by naming the Thessalonians themselves as Paul's reputation (δόξα).<sup>45</sup>

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44 Wannamaker sees the transformation of Christian experience behind “glory” in this case, and I would agree (Wannamaker, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 153). However, I would be more specific and link this “experience” with reputation.

45 In one of the most recent commentaries, Fee, like those who wrote before him, passes over “glory” without comment on its meaning in this context (Fee, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 111).

*A Reputation Sourced in Christ 2 Th. 1.3-2.14*

As Paul pens his second missive,<sup>46</sup> he has heard about some anxiety within the community which had resulted from a misunderstanding related to eschatology. The problem does not really have to do with timing, but rather it involves the very nature of the day of the Lord. In the present section, Paul reaffirms the character of this event: absolute justice, judgment, reward for the right people, and a purification of the church. But before going into all of that, Paul begins with the same theme that he took up at the beginning of his previous missive, *viz.*, reputation.

Based on their continued suffering and marginalized status, some among the Thessalonians seem to have begun to doubt: some questioned God's justice, others disbelieved their own worthiness for reward, and yet others suspected that the day of the Lord had come and gone—leaving them condemned and judged unworthy of the blessings associated with that day. Therefore, Paul needs to remind them about who they are, and he begins with their reputation which, as we have already observed, rests not on the usual actions, states, and moral qualities but on their obedience to the divine call. Immediately, Paul highlights the security of that reputation. Indeed, he had been continually boasting about them and spreading the word about their faithfulness in the midst of trials, but now we learn that his confidence to do is based on the impressive growth of their faith and their love one for another (2 Th. 1.3-4). So, at the outset, Paul encourages the doubters by holding up their secure reputation for steadfast obedience to the call of God as exhibit A in a section designed to end their eschatological misgivings. Indeed, verses 5 and 6 go on to explain that this secure reputation provides “evidence” (ἔνδειγμα)<sup>47</sup> of God's just judgment<sup>48</sup> which has counted them worthy of his kingdom (2 Th. 1.5).

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46 Refer to footnote 1 for my views on authorship.

47 The usual options for the referent of *endeigma* include: their endurance of faith, the persecution and affliction experienced by them, or their endurance and faith in the face of persecution (Wannamaker, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 220). This matter is a sticky wicket for most commentators who struggle in their attempts to understand how the Thessalonian's suffering can be evidence of just judgment. Our reading avoids these particular difficulties.

48 Commentators often argue about whether judgment is present or future (cf. Malherbe, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 394-395). We have reached the unique conclusion that the judgment has happened in the past when God called

Furthermore, justice in this area means that the Thessalonians can also expect justice with regard to their enemies who inflict hardship and cause them to suffer for the kingdom's sake (2 Th. 1.6). On that day, the tormentors will receive payment in kind in the form of tribulations while Paul and the Thessalonians will receive the opposite, much needed rest (*ἀνεσιν*) (2 Th. 1.6-7). Interestingly, the following verses (8-9) expand on the identity of these enemies, and it seems that Paul does so to alleviate the anxieties of those who feared being God's enemies rather than his friends. For, the real enemies are precisely the opposite of the Thessalonians when it comes to reputation. The Thessalonians had received a divine sort of reputation through obedience to the gospel, but the enemies are “those who do not obey the gospel” (*τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ*) (2 Th. 1.8). Further, we learn in verse 9 that these condemned ones will undergo a terrible punishment: utter and everlasting ruin<sup>49</sup> away from the presence of the Lord and away from his mighty sort of reputation (*ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ*).<sup>50</sup> So, the very ones who excluded Paul and the Thessalonians from the reputation rat race in the end find themselves utterly banned from the only kind of reputation that counts for anything while the reputation of the Thessalonians remains securely intact. Evidently, Paul has specifically calibrated these verses to remind the Thessalonians of their approved status via the theme of reputation.

In what follows, Paul goes on to describe the scene on the day of the Lord. At this time, Jesus will appear with the purpose and result of receiving glory (*ἐνδοξασθῆναι*) and being marveled at, and this from believers.<sup>51</sup> Something unmistakably numinous and awe inspiring is happening here, but one cannot escape the nuance of Jesus' own

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the Thessalonians into his kingdom.

49 On ruin rather than destruction see Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 196.

50 Based on its apparent allusion to Isa. 2.10 LXX, Fee understands this phrase as meaning “the splendor of his glory as the Mighty One” (Fee, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 259). Although Fee mentions nothing about reputation, it seems probable that the splendor of the Lord in the Isaiah text had something to do, at least in part, with Yahweh's renown, i.e., reputation among the nations. Nonetheless, I doubt that the Thessalonians were cognizant of any allusion.

51 Contra Wannamaker who suggests that those glorifying and marveling are none other than the former persecutors (Wannamaker, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 231).

reputation being ratified if not augmented in this event. Perhaps in confirmation of this, Paul sees part of the glory that redounds to Christ here as directly resulting from the Thessalonians' belief as verse 10b makes evident “ὅτι ἐπιστεύθη τὸ μαρτύριον ἡμῶν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς.” Paul then reveals his habitual prayer that his congregation will live worthy of their calling by continuing to do what it demands (vs. 11). Finally, the apostle shows where their endurance ultimately ends up: with the glorification (ἐνδοξασθῆ) of the name of the Lord among the Thessalonians *but also* with the glorification of the Thessalonians by the Lord (ὑμεῖς ἐν αὐτῷ) (vs. 12). Thus, obedience results both in Christ attaining an even greater level of repute within the church, and in the augmentation of the church's own divinely rooted reputation for steadfast obedience to the call.

At this point Paul departs from the subject of reputation, and he offers some more proofs that demonstrate the futurity of the coming day of the Lord (2 Th. 2.1-12). After describing the nature of the day of the Lord in lurid detail, Paul winds down chapter 2 by returning to his purpose of reassuring the Thessalonians regarding their eschatological angst. Verse 13 affirms their salvation as a kind of first-fruits.<sup>52</sup> The concept of the first-fruits has to do with the part that purifies the whole.<sup>53</sup> Thus, Paul endorses not only their own salvation, but also implies that their reputation for obedience unto salvation has resulted in others coming to Christ. Now Paul goes completely back to his original proof by bringing up the divine sort of reputation once again. He affirms that God had called the Thessalonians for salvation through the gospel into “the possession of a reputation sourced in our Lord Jesus Christ” (εἰς περιποίησιν δόξης τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) (vs. 14). In this way, reputation forms the bookends of chapters 1 and 2—showing that the reputation which Paul had elaborated in his first epistle remains intact and that it proves that the Thessalonians have nothing to fear when it comes to the day of the Lord. Instead, those persecutors who have cut themselves off from the good repute sourced in Christ are the ones who should worry.

Finally, chapter 2 closes with several exhortations in imperative form that urge the Thessalonians to continue to live a life

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52 A textual variant gives interpreters the choice between “first fruits” and “beginning.” We are following Witherington and others in accepting the former reading over the latter (Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 231).

53 *Ibid.*, 233.

that supports the reputation which they enjoy. Notably, this accords nicely with Greco-Roman thinking. For it was widely understood that one could not take reputation for granted. One had to continually guard it and build it. Homer's heroes, for instance, had high expectations laid upon them because of their birthright and mighty deeds, but they also had the burden of continually upholding their reputation through meritorious actions.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, Plutarch exhorts old men to continually maintain their reputations since he realizes that even a lifetime of good deeds needs constant maintenance.<sup>55</sup> In the same manner, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to keep obeying the call of the gospel as they have been doing so that their reputation may remain secure.

## CONCLUSION

In a situation where climbing the ladder of reputation was everything and in which Paul and his congregation had been knocked off that ladder, the apostle responds by abandoning old concepts of reputation and filling the word with new wine. For him reputation has a divine source and quality, and it derives directly from obedience to the calling of God. In Paul's hands reputation reminds the Thessalonians of who they are through obedience to Christ and his gospel, and it exhorts them to continually guard that reputation by acting in a manner worthy of it. Perhaps in the future, this neglected theme will receive consideration from expositors of 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

On a personal note, during my time at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, I thoroughly enjoyed the relationships which blossomed between my fellow faculty members and my beloved students. My family still reminisces about the many occasions on which our house was filled with students who sometimes came for parties, movies, Bible studies, home groups and other times...just came. Those years were indeed rich, and, in many ways, I can't wait to get to heaven so that I may fully appreciate the fruit of them. It is my hope that this article will crown those years of teaching, and it is perhaps fitting for it to do so since the concepts that I have herein articulated first occurred to me as I was preparing a sermon for an APTS chapel service. In that sermon on 2 Th. 2.13-17, "a reputation sourced in Christ" functioned as one of the

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54 Lendon, *Soldiers*, 37.

55 Plutarch, *Old Men*, 786E-787F.

main points, but I really believe that it is *the point* of everything I tried to teach. Real reputation does not come from letters behind our names. Rather it comes from obedience to the divine call. Nonetheless, the one called to teach the Bible must obey the call in such a way that his or her obedience matches the height of the call. The letters are just fine: provided that the years spent getting them are filled with the right sort of stuff.

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