Now that I have discussed the purpose of 1 Thessalonians and spent a couple of posts talking about one of its most interesting passages, on which the modern Christian notion of a “rapture” is based, I am able to return to my point of departure, a textual variant found in 1 Thess. 2:7. This variant has nothing to do with the question of what Paul thought would happen when Jesus returned, sometime in his lifetime. It is an earlier part of the letter where Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of the time that he had spent with them when he converted them to their new faith.

This is a very joyful part of the letter, one of the most sentimental passages of all of Paul’s letters, where he speaks of the relationship he had with his converts when he was there. But the description is a bit hard to pin down, in part because of this one textual variant. The variant depends on the presence or non-presence of just one letter of the alphabet. Some manuscripts have it, and others don’t. And it is very hard to decide which reading is to be preferred as what Paul wrote; moreover, it is difficult to decide whether the change was made by a scribe accidentally or on purpose.

In chapter 2 of the book Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of the time he was with them. He begins the passage by pointing out that before he and his Christian companions had arrived in Thessalonica they had been “shamefully treated at Philippi” (2:2). In other words, they had met rejection and possibly violent opposition when establishing the church in this other city earlier. Possibly Paul and the others had been beaten up, or otherwise publicly shamed.

He goes on to say that when he preached the gospel to them, the Thessalonians, he did not use flattering words and he did not seek approval from people – but only from God (2:4-6). He indicates how he had spent his time with the Thessalonian, working “night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God.” (2:9). This in itself is an interesting verse. Modern scholarship has taken it to mean that when Paul was with them, he had an actual job that he worked at all hours, so as not to be a financial strain on his converts (i.e., they did not have to support his preaching ministry through financial assistance). Paul apparently preached while on the job.

In the midst of these recollections comes the passage that I am interested in discussing: “We could have made demands upon you as apostles of Christ; but we were XXX among you,

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More Intriguing Problems with 1 Thessalonians 2:7
The Myth of the Rapture: Calling a Spade a Spade