

THE ADULT TEACHER
LESSON 7~ A COMPELLING EXAMPLE OF MINISTRY
NOVEMBER 15, 2020

Background Scripture: I Thessalonians 2

Lesson Passage: I Thessalonians 2:1-13 (HCSB)

Introduction: In I Thessalonians Chapter 1, Paul begins with a salutation or greeting (1:1) followed by thanksgiving for the work of God and the response of the Thessalonians to the Gospel (I Thessalonians 1:2-10). He described them as a pattern or model for all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia because of the way the Word of the Lord had sounded forth from this body of believers. This is then followed by a review of Paul's ministry (really the ministry of his team) to the Thessalonians.

As we approach our lesson Scripture in Chapter 2, let us remember that the occasion for this chapter was the slander Paul had received from the religious Judaizers who claimed he was only out for personal gain. Paul reviewed their ministry to silence these attacks, not because he was concerned about the Thessalonians' approval, but to protect the work the Lord had accomplished through him and his partners. The Apostle uses two instructive analogies to describe his ministry: (1) that of a faithful steward (vss. 1-6), and (2) as that of loving parents: first as a loving mother (vss. 7-8), and then as a concerned father (vss. 9-12).

Scripture Reference: I Thessalonians 2:1-13 (HCSB)

1 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our visit with you was not without result. 2 On the contrary, after we had previously suffered, and we were treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, we were emboldened by our God to speak the gospel of God to you in spite of great opposition. 3 For our exhortation didn't come from error or impurity or an intent to deceive. 4 Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but rather God, who examines our hearts. 5 For we never used flattering speech, as you know, or had greedy motives—God is our witness— 6 and we didn't seek glory from people, either from you or from others. 7 Although we could have been a burden as Christ's apostles, instead we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother nurtures her own children. 8 We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. 9 For you remember our labor and hardship, brothers. Working night and day so that we would not burden any of you, we preached God's gospel to you. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you believers. 11 As you know, like a father with his own children, 12 we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. 13 "This is why we constantly thank God, because when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you welcomed it not as a human message, but as it truly is, the word of God, which also works effectively in you who believe."

Topic Explored: "A Compelling Example of Ministry" ~ In our lesson today, we are given a glimpse of Paul the evangelist and Paul the edifier or builder of believers. What a compelling and wonderful model for us today; for here we see two of the main purposes of the church—reaching and teaching. In a day like ours when the authority of God's Word is being ignored and when the church and its ministers so often turn to human methods and operate out of false motives, this chapter is not only powerfully instructive, but it stands as a strong rebuke to so much of what we see happening in ministry today.

Paul's enemies had accused him of being a self-seeking peddler of this new message of the gospel, but the Apostle could appeal to their personal knowledge of the character of his ministry like those in the

same family. His ministry in its manner of life, motives, and methods were above reproach so much so that he could even appeal to the witness of God (I Thessalonians 2:5). We each need to evaluate our own motives, methods, and the means we use as we seek to live our lives before others in the light of the challenges and insights of this great passage. We may not be guilty of the gross fraud of some of those whose names and stories have made the news, but we can be guilty of some of the same type of self-seeking, though on a much smaller and more subtle scale.

Memory Verses: *10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you believers (I Thessalonians 2:10) HCSB*

Lesson Focus: I Thessalonians 2:1-13 (HCSB)

Verse 1 ~ A vital principle here is that we must not ignore the fact that our personal lives speak powerfully to the nature of our ministry in the motives, methods, and the means we employ to accomplish the work of God. Our behavior patterns demonstrate the validity and biblical authenticity of what we are doing. And the fact that you and I may be engaged in a lot of works (religious activity) does not in itself prove the quality of our service and its value to the Lord.

“. . . that our coming to you was not without results” or as the NASB translates it, “was not in vain”? Paul is using this word with regard to the essential character, earnestness, and sincerity of their coming to proclaim God’s truth to the Thessalonians. Paul determined that it was not empty and without power or prompted by vain methods, motives, and means.

Verse 2 ~ The first proof their coming and ministry was not empty was the fact they had preached boldly in spite of serious persecution. There are many reasons Christians do not witness or share their faith, and no doubt, fear is the underlying issue—fear of failure, fear of ridicule, fear of hostility, and so on. Note that the Apostle quickly added the important words, “in our God.” Many are bold for the wrong reasons. They were bold and willing to suffer because of their fellowship with the Lord and their confidence of His presence, protection and provision regardless of the opposition.

The nature of their boldness is stressed in the words, “amid much opposition.” The Apostle had in mind both inward and outward conflict that believers often face in ministry if they are faithful to God’s calling and purpose. Men who could sing hymns to God in prison after such insolent and vile treatment for preaching the gospel, but who were still not discouraged from preaching the gospel under such conditions, were not likely to be phonies. We must keep our eyes on the goal ([Matthew 6:19-24](#); [Hebrews 12:1-3](#); [1 Peter 1:13](#)), with singleness of mind and purpose.

Verses 3-4 ~ In their motives and methods, Paul and his team were pure, seeking only to please God and minister in a biblical manner. Paul and his team never ministered for personal gain or self-centered pursuits. They were real, authentic, and operated out of their relationship with Him as they rested in the truth and power of God’s Word. These men were so secure in the Lord, they had peeled off all the typical masks and were able to stand humbly before God and people. Because they were authentic, free from cover ups, they also never resorted to human schemes or strategies to accomplish the work of God.

Paul said they came “as Christ’s messengers”. Second, as those sent out to preach the Word. They had the right to be supported by their converts and by others to whom they ministered. However, Paul and his associates chose not to use, so that their motives might not be mistaken. Third, there may also be the issue here that since this team had come with Paul, who was an apostle in the technical sense, they had special authority and powers. But even this, they refused to use. They came as servant leaders— as shepherds. Finally, he shows their ministry, which he defines as a stewardship, was the product of testing.

We see the constant aim of the Apostle and his associates. Whenever our primary aim is to please men, we lose our capacity to please God. Conversely, only when we seek to please God and speak according to His Word in love, do we truly have the capacity to minister effectively to others. God knows our heart, weighs our motives, and searches us. What a challenge. Our ministries must be considered and examined in the light of God's standards, and not man's and that includes our own. We are all accountable before the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:1-5).

Verses 5-6 ~ "God is our witness". As one who lived in the light of the resurrection, Paul was one who always endeavored to have a blameless conscience for he knew that God knew his heart. Paul has appealed to the Thessalonian's knowledge of him and his team, but they could not judge his inner motives for this lay beyond their ability, so he appeals to God. They were not in the ministry to get their name up in lights or to be patted on the back. As servants of the Savior, we all need to have the general motive of pleasing God and seeking our praise from Him rather than people, but this must be carried out in the specifics of life which have a subtle way of encroaching on our general objectives.

Verses 7-8 ~ In the preceding section the Apostle compared their ministry with that of a faithful steward. Now the Apostle uses two new figures to describe their ministry: a loving mother and a concerned father. Here the emphasis is first on gentleness and willingness, and then on fatherly instruction backed up by godly example.

By secular standards, Paul and his workers were marked to the end of their days by poverty, weakness, disrepute and all sorts of tribulation; but they assessed their lot by other than secular standards—"as having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (2 Corinthians 6:10). But more impressive than their disclaimer of unworthy motives and actions is the assertion of their loving care for their converts. Far from seeking any material help from their converts, they were eager to share with them all that they had, and indeed all that they were. They were in their midst as equals. There was no sense of superiority nor any attempt to lord it over their converts ([1 Peter 5:3](#)).

Verse 9 ~ This verse could well go with either the maternal or the paternal analogy. The "for" connects it to the preceding as an explanation of their commitment to these believers. But because of the emphasis on working to support themselves, and because he immediately takes up the figure of the father; these verses portray the ministry of the missionary team from the standpoint or analogy of a father.

Paul's accusers had accused him and his partners in ministry of greed saying they were mere peddlers of some new teaching for the purpose of financial gain. So, the Apostle reminds them of the facts which they well knew. Also, remember there is a general biblical principle that a father works to support his family. Though the church at Philippi had sent some financial help, Paul, who was a tentmaker, worked to pay for his own needs. Since there were no paid teachers in Palestine, it was necessary that a rabbi learn a trade to support himself and his family. Paul had done just this. According the Lord's teaching and Paul's, ministers of the gospel had the right to be supported for their work in preaching and teaching, but Paul had forfeited that right when planting new ministries.

Verse 10 ~ Since true godliness involves both the outward, what men see, and the inward, what God alone can see, Paul appeals to both: to what they had observed and to the witness of God. Sometimes we can fool people, but we can never fool the Lord. The Apostle was ever mindful that he was accountable to the Lord for his life and ministry (Hebrews 13:17). He referred to their behavior as "holy and righteous and blameless." "Holy" stresses one's commitment to the spiritual disciplines of prayer and studying the Word, to worship, to loving the Lord, and acting properly toward others. "Righteous" is one's relationship to men in a manner consistent with the directives of the Word—honesty, truthfulness, purity, goodness, charity or acts of love, etc. "Blameless" means free from

charges or blame. Not faultless in the sense of sinless, but free from blame. Though he and his partners had been accused of wrongdoing, the charges were all false.

The clause “our conduct toward you who believe” reminds us of one of the most important principles of effective ministry whether in the home, in the church or on the job; it’s the principle of being an example. We can’t motivate or communicate to others what we don’t have ourselves ([John 13:14](#); [1 Timothy 1:16](#); [4:12](#); [Titus 2:7](#)).

Verse 11, 12 ~ Like a father with his children, he found time for personal counsel and to develop personal relationships. In large churches, even a large staff can’t logistically accomplish this, but this personal element is important; and Paul will later encourage this church to be engaged in this very kind of personal ministry. Children need both encouraging and challenging. The nature of the missionaries’ motherly and fatherly ministry to these believers was God-centered. The precise aim is expressed in the words, “*That you may walk in a way worthy of God.*” This reminds us of our need as a church to have biblical goals and objectives. We are not here just to do religious things. “Walk” means metaphorically, one’s course of life in all areas. This principal says that the Lord must be brought into everything we do since we are servants and ambassadors of His kingdom and rule. Whatever we do should be done to glorify Him. “Who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” expresses the reason and motive. “Who calls you” is a present tense. Not Who *has called* you, but Who *calls* you. It points to a continuous work of God through the ministry of the church using the Word and walking by the Spirit.

“His own kingdom and glory.” This strongly reminds us that there are other kingdoms and other kinds of glory that are competing for our allegiance and that of our spiritual children. So we must not only be alert to these false influences but take precautions to guard against their influences on our spiritual children in Christ. In the latter part of this chapter and the next, we will see the Apostle’s deep concern for this very thing.

Verse 13 ~ “*For this cause we also thank God without ceasing*”. Things have not always been comfortable for Paul and his colleagues in their relationship with these Thessalonian Christians, but they have maintained thankful hearts. The Thessalonians had to decide whether Paul’s preaching was something that he had made up—or whether it came from God, as Paul claimed. If they had thought it might simply be Paul’s invention, they could not have accepted its claims on their lives, especially once they began to experience persecution. So Paul gives thanks that they received his preaching as the word of God—which it was. The Word of God was continuing to work in the lives of these Thessalonian Christians—guiding them, strengthening them—blessing them—helping them to grow in faith.

Let’s talk about it. . .

Making it Personal:

- Our lesson is a wonderful illustration of how the knowledge of God should transform us if we really believe God’s truth. This again reinforces the truth that Christianity is a relationship with God that is to change us from the inside out. It’s the inner person and the life of faith in the reality of the living God that must change us. Otherwise, we are like white-washed sepulchers full of decaying corpses.
- Too often we are willing enough to give out the Word or our opinions on the Word, but we aren’t willing to give of ourselves. To give the gospel without the willingness to give of ourselves to

others as we are able is a contradiction because the gospel is a message about the giving of God's Son and His giving of His own life for us ([1 John 4](#)).

Closing Prayer: *“Thank You, Dear Lord, for this beautiful story of faithful ministers to You and Your precious Word. Help us to be faithful as pampering mothers and fathers who pursue Your kingdom and glory, rather than the world’s. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen!”*

Notes
