

1 Thessalonians 2:1-13 • Definition of a True Minister

Introduction

[Note: There are no typos for the reading; the study is purposely overlapped in some spots.]

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 we have a rich description of how a true minister (missionary, pastor, teacher) can be identified in the course of carrying out their ministry. These are the people that will never be paraded in the media, the Spirit-filled servants of Christ that get little public notice. Paul shows us how to distinguish godly ministers from frauds and provides a model to which we should aspire.

¹For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, ²but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. ³For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. ⁵For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— ⁶nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. ⁷But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. ⁸Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

³For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. ⁵For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness—

[Read 2:1-8]

Q: What are the circumstances Paul refers to in v.1-2? [Leader: More info in Acts 16:11-17:9]

A: Philippi is where Paul and Silas were jailed and suffered intense persecution. Paul would have to walk 100 miles to Thessalonica before finding adequate, “fertile” soil to continue preaching the Gospel. He would again face intense persecution there and be forced to move on to Berea.

Q: Why does Paul say in v.1, “...our coming to you was not in vain”?

A: Because some of the Thessalonians were receptive to the gospel, converted to Christ, and a church was sustained by them there.

Q: Why does Paul say in v.2, “...we had the boldness in our God to speak to you...”?

A: Because of the opposition Paul and Silas faced in preaching to them the Gospel.

Application: What is our reaction to sharing the Gospel when we face opposition? How might that affect our presentation?

[Read 2:3-5]

Q: What are the 3 ways in v.3-4 Paul DENIES that the Gospel was presented to the Thessalonians?

- (1) “...not from error or impurity...”
- (2) “...or by way of deceit...”,
- (3) “...not as pleasing to men but God...”

Q: What’s the point Paul is trying to get across? What do you think he’s comparing himself to?

A: The presentation of the Gospel was completely truthful. It was not given with ulterior motives associated with a hidden agenda or the machinations of a con artist. It was not delivered in a deceptive or manipulative way but up front and truthful. He was probably comparing himself to the wandering religious hucksters of the day, or even to the Jews who were saying false things about him.

Q: According to v.4, what is one characteristic of the Gospel that is uncharacteristic of false teachings?

A: It is not pleasing to men but to God. If they preached a message pleasing to men rather than God, then it would have been a message without hardship and suffering, for almost all false teachers become

personally, materially rich from their followers.

Q: In v.5, how would Paul have presented the Gospel if there had been a “pretext for greed”?

A: He would have charged money for the message.

Application: How do Christians today offer gifts in the “pretext of greed”?
[Read 2:6-8]

⁶nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. ⁷But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. ⁸Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

Taken as a whole, let's examine v. 1-8 and identify the characteristics of how the Gospel was presented to the Thessalonians.

Q: What is the chief characteristic conveyed in v.1?

A: The evangelists came to **them**.

Q: What is the chief characteristic conveyed in v.2?

A: They came boldly, even after suffering and opposition.

Q: What are the chief characteristics conveyed in v.3?

- (1) The Gospel was presented truthfully, which also means “fully” (e.g., not dodging the issue of sin).
- (2) The Gospel was not accompanied with sexual impurity, gratifying their own desires.
- (3) The Gospel was presented plainly, not with manipulation but forthright.

Q: What are the chief characteristics conveyed in v.4?

- (1) They knew God approved what they did.
- (2) They presented to others what had been entrusted to them.
- (3) They were no man-pleasers in their presentation.

Q: What are the chief characteristics conveyed in v.5?

- (1) They did not use “flattering speech” or charm to persuade people.
- (2) They did not charge for their ministry.

Q: What are the chief characteristics conveyed in v.6?

- (1) They did not seek recognition, approval or glory from others
- (2) They did not exercise their apostolic authority over them, even though they could have.

Q: What is the chief characteristic conveyed in v.7?

A: They presented the Gospel gently, in a nurturing manner.

Q: What is the chief characteristic conveyed in v.8?

A: They loved them -- not just seeing them as objects of their ministry -- so much so that they would have laid down their lives.

Application: This is the application of Ephesians 4:15, “...but speaking the truth in love....” All “truth” is just as bad as all “love”. How does Paul teach us in this passage to equally temper the truth of the message with the example of love in our life?

⁷But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. ⁸Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

⁹For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; ¹¹just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, ¹²so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

¹³For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

[Read 2:7-12]

Q: Paul uses two illustrations to show how his ministry team regarded the Thessalonians. What are they?

A: A nursing mother (v.7) and a caring father (v.11)

Q: In v.9-11 there are 10 ways that the ministry team behaved in the course of their ministry to the Thessalonians. What are they? (Note how they parallel traits associated with good parents.)

- (v.9) They worked for their own support.
- (v.9) They experienced hardship in doing so, meaning they lived on meager means.
- (v.9) They worked night and day (the work of earning an income and the work of the church)
- (v.9) They made sure they were not a burden to anyone.
- (v.10) They were devoted to their task, showing their sincerity.
- (v.10) They were upright – no “hanky panky” or worldly ways about them.
- (v.10) They were blameless – no one could find fault with them in any way.
- (v.11) They exhorted them (i.e., they taught them).
- (v.11) They encouraged them.
- (v.11) They implored and challenged each one of them to change their lives for Christ’s sake.

Q: What was the purpose behind these behaviors? What was Paul’s ministry team’s goal?

A: According to v.12, “so that (they) may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls (them). . . .”

Application: How do these methods of sharing the gospel compare to others we have seen in our society today? How do they compare to our attitude as a mother or father to those to whom we minister?

[Read 2:13]

Q: What were the results of all these efforts and approaches? How do we know whether Paul’s ministry team was successful or not?

A: The Thessalonians didn’t “receive” the message as just another as expounded by man, but “accepted” it as “the word of God” and experienced its actual working as a result of their faith.

Overall Application: How does this relate to our desire for our children, for those we teach, or for those we win to Christ and disciple?