

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Verses 1-2:

--**For** . . . connects this section with the last. Paul is not moving on to a new discussion. He saw God's hand in the fruit of their arrival in Thessalonica, in their boldness as preachers, and in their welcomed example as Christian ministers.

--This section becomes a somewhat wider view of what Paul said in **1:5+9**.

--Some see the rest of chapter two as a defense against accusations from Paul's enemies—Jewish or Gentile. That is a possibility, but the problem contextually is Paul doesn't acknowledge any slander or accusations as he does in other epistles like Galatians or 1+2 Corinthians.

--To me, this section seems to make more sense as a continued reminder of the work of God in them and a continued encouragement to keep following the example God set before them. The emphasis of thankfulness for God's work and their example is why Paul repeats, **as you know** so often through the epistle: **1:5, 2:1, 5, 11; 3:3-4; 4:2; 5:2**.

--**you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain**. Their arrival was not fruitless or worthless. God's hand in the work was obvious.

--**(2)** Paul and Silas had been dragged into the marketplace by a mob, slandered, had their clothes torn off, were publicly beaten with rods, tossed into jail, and bound with iron stocks. Despite the kindness of the jailor tending their wounds (**Acts 16:33**) they no doubt still carried physical marks of mistreatment.

--Paul and Silas were men just like us, they didn't like getting beaten, and so they saw the hand of God in their own boldness to speak the gospel of God **in much conflict**.

--That means *through* or *despite* real opposition. It was not *potential* opposition. It was *actual* opposition. Everyone in Thessalonica did not welcome them. Their message didn't make everyone happy.

--Even so, while still licking their wounds from Philippi, they were **bold in our God**—bold in and for the God they had a personal relationship with.

Verse 3:

--Now Paul begins to remind the Thessalonians what they were not like. This is an important and instructive section of Scripture for any minister or preacher. Paul begins by listing three things their message did not have:

1) **error**: They didn't have bad doctrine as a source. Error is the source of every cult or false religion. Something wrong, false, and ungodly.

2) **uncleanness**: The word here gives us the sense of an impure motive—any sexual or non-sexual impure motive. *Certainly much of this then and now, both sexually or otherwise!*

3) **deceit**: Paul means their message didn't have guile, trickery, or bait.

Verse 4:

--***But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.*** . . . Paul recognizes God's hand in their ministry and calling—they had been chosen and tested and approved by God alone.

--***even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.*** Having been chosen and approved by God, Paul and his companions rejected any thought or temptation to change God's message to make it more pleasing to men.

--The ultimate test of a life, or a heart, is whether it is pleasing to God. Jesus' testimony from the Father and of Himself was that He was pleasing to God and only did those things that pleased Him (**Mt. 3:17; 17:5; Jn. 8:29**).

--Pleasing God and pleasing men will always come into conflict. You are mastered by the one you choose.

****Galatians 1:10: For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.****

--Sadly, there is so much preaching and ministry aimed at pleasing men and totally ignoring the Enthroned One whose pleasure is perfect and sinless and best. *So many afraid to preach on roles of men and women, sin, hell, divorce, church discipline, the Bible, etc.*

Verse 5:

--***For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.***

--Paul says they never flattered—preached to the crowd—to cloak their covetousness. Sadly, there is good money in the God racket! *Denominational systems with totally unsaved ministers who get free homes, good salaries, plenty of vacation, good retirement, respectable careers, etc.*

--Much of what they do seems good, but really it is only a ***cloak for covetousness***. They are not fully obedient, faithfully speaking God's Word, holding God's ground, suffering for God's cause, because really, they are only in it for the money or comfort.

--How can you know? If either ran out, they would be gone.

****2 Peter 2:3: By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.****

--Jesus says that these individuals are hirelings. They have a price. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had no price.

****John 10:12-13: But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.****

Verse 6:

--Paul says they never sought glory, praise, or honor from the Thessalonians or anyone else.

Even when they could have *made demands as apostles of Christ*.

--The language could be translated: *as apostles we could have been with weight*.

--Paul and his companions didn't seek honor from men (man-glory) and didn't, as we say in modern times, "throw their weight around". They were not building their own kingdoms or ministering as authoritarians.

3 John 9-10: I wrote to the church, but Diotrefes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

--These issues are all too common today as they were in the early church.

Verses 7-9:

--(7) Now Paul is going to say what they were like.

--First, they *were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children*. This is a remarkable picture.

--The Greek word for *gentle* is only used here and in **2 Timothy 2:24: And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient. . .**

--Paul gently "mothered" these newborn babes in Christ. He was not harsh or forceful with them. As a mother, he provided what they needed and what they could actually eat. *Ministers must be careful not to rush babes from milk when they don't yet have the spiritual teeth to chew meat.*

--(8) Paul truly loved these new converts. He wasn't there only to give a message, tally up the number of converts or baptisms, and then take off.

--Paul says they were *well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but our own lives, because you had become dear to us*.

--Paul, Silas, and Timothy were willing to face persecution, imprisonment, and even death to preach the gospel and *live* among these believers until they grew mature enough to be independent. Sharing a life is much different than merely preaching to a crowd.

--If you are not ready to be with people, love them, and share your life with them, then you are also not ready to preach to them. *Missionaries and church planters know that to be effective, they must move into new cultures and neighborhoods and share life with the people they hope to minister to.*

--Paul was there to give, to impart, to serve, not to receive. Wasn't this Christ's example in what He did for us?! He did not come to be served but to serve.

--(9) Part of sharing life with them was supporting himself to never burden them, to set an example (**Acts 18:3; 2 Thess. 3:6**), and to protect his ministry from false accusations.

--This too, was notable, as it was most common in those days to stop all work and sleep when it was dark. Not Paul, he was working and preaching day or night!

--**labor** refers to the actual work, and **toil** refers to the intensity of the work.

--Many ministers today are still bi-vocational, and even those who are blessed enough to be supported should still be working day and night! There isn't a "clock out" time for a true servant of Jesus Christ.

--I will just add here that doesn't mean Jesus didn't recognize times when His disciples needed to get away and rest. Obviously, the Sabbath was a big part of that. Rest and vacation—when properly used—helps a minister work better. All rest and relaxation should be industrious—not indulgent—in the long run.

Verses 10-12:

--(10) Paul expands on their character in God. He says they lived **devoutly** (before God); **justly** (in deeds); and **blamelessly** (in public). He is not claiming perfection, but he is claiming godliness!

--(11) They were not only motherly but were also fatherly. He dealt with **every one**—being *each one individually*—as a father would his children. They were more than a crowd. They were like his own unique kids.

--In that manner, Paul says they **exhorted, and comforted, and charged** each of them as was fitting for the individual. We all need different types of admonitions at different times of life. God, as the Best Father, gives us each form as we need them.

--(12) What was the point of all their fatherly admonitions? What was the ultimate goal? Paul says: **that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.**

--Paul constantly exhorted believers to **walk worthy of God (Rom. 16:2; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10)**. Not *to be saved* but because they *already were saved*.

--We so easily forget what we are called to. We have a high calling (**Phil. 3:14**); a holy calling (**2 Tim. 1:9**); and a heavenly calling (**Heb. 3:1**), and we should act like it!

--Some Christians are always asking: *Is it okay for me to do such and such?*

--Maybe the better question for us is: *Is it a worthy thing for a son or daughter of God (called to eternal glory in an eternal kingdom) to do?*

--Practically, how much would our lives change if Jesus was ruling and reigning from Jerusalem right now? Would we even like that world?

--Personally, how different will my perspective be five minutes into eternity? When we are standing fresh in glory, power, reward, and immortality?

--I think, at that moment, we will all wish we had walked more worthy of **His own kingdom and glory!** We will wish we had lived with more courage to love, forgive, sacrifice, labor, surrender, and please Him alone!

Verse 13:

--**For this reason we also thank God without ceasing.** . . . ties us back into the context from **1:2** on till this point. Paul is thinking of another reason he constantly thanked God.

--***because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.*** . . . The Thessalonians ***received*** the word with their ears, but more importantly, they ***welcomed*** the word of God, as the word of God, with their hearts.

--It is a work of God when anyone receives the Word of God—***as it is in truth***—the Word of God. How many receive the Word of God as: a cultural box to check, as a skeptic, as something to make them feel better, as a good idea, as the preacher’s opinion that may or may not be true, as a hazy non-reality, ask fake-life Vs. real-life, as a bored Christian, as anything other than it truly is—God’s own Word.

--The Word of God that we hold (and the Thessalonians only heard the spoken message of the apostles) would not be more authoritative if Moses or Elijah appeared in our bedroom and spoke it to us; or if God whispered it to us in the night like He did for the child Samuel; or if we sat at Jesus’ feet like one of the disciples and heard Him speak part of John’s gospel.

--This truth relates to what Paul said back in **1:5**. For the Word of God to come in power, it must be received ***as it is in truth, the word of God***. Our attitude to the Word of God is a direct reflection of our relationship with the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

--***which also effectively works in you who believe***. The authority of God’s Word isn’t only for the moment of salvation. The Word of God continues to effectively work in all believers after salvation. God’s Word has its own active dynamic, its own life, its own force.

--Every truth is a seed with potential life, bread that gives life, water that satisfies, light that shines, milk that grows, meat that strengthens, and manna as provision from heaven.

--God’s Word, His spoken power that brought all things into existence, continues to give and sustain life.

****Isaiah 55:10-11: For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I send it.****

--How do we receive His Word? Have we grown cold? Have we been deceived into thinking it is less than it is? Is it just another man-made idea tossed into a world of ideas? Or is it what it truly is—the Word of God?

Verses 14-16:

--***(14) For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans.*** . . . Here was one of Paul’s main concerns for this church, even though it was also a reason for praise—persecution from their countrymen.

--He likens it to the persecution faced by various local fellowships in Judea. The Jews were not happy with Jewish converts to Jesus Christ! *Modern religious Jews still feel the same.*

--It is always particularly challenging when holding to Christ and His Word forces someone to choose between Jesus and one's family and nation.

Matthew 10:37: He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

--If even my dearest loved ones force me into a position to choose between them and Jesus Christ, my choice must be Jesus Christ.

--**(15) who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us. . .** Paul is not being anti-Semitic here. He simply states the truth of what Jesus Christ and the other apostles said about godless religious Judaism. The early church was familiar with Jesus' parables and how He had spoken against the religious leaders—**Mt. 21:33-46 + Mt. 23:29-36.**

--Peter and Stephen made the same points.

Acts 2:36: Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Acts 7:51-53: You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.

--Paul adds: **and they do not please God. . .** Why? Paul had been this as Saul! He personally learned that all his zealous works were persecuting Jesus and not pleasing God.

--**and are contrary to all men. . .** In their religious bigotry and exclusiveness, which worked out in their active persecution and opposition to the truth of the gospel.

--**(16) forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved. . .** The rejection of their Messiah by the Jews was carried over into their intention to keep Gentiles from salvation in Christ. They didn't want anyone to **be saved** without becoming a part of their Jewish religious sect.

--Paul is tracing out two lines here:

1) The prophets, the Messiah, those that receive the Word of the Messiah.

2) Those that killed the prophets, the Messiah, and reject and persecute those that preach the Word or accept the Word of the Messiah.

--For line number 2—not all Jews as God will keep His promises to Israel—Paul says: **so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. . .** Their sins are full, ripe, or heaped up. Similar to the language of **Gen. 15:16: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.**

--Because they have filled up their measure of sin, Paul adds: **but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.** The language here is a bit vague. Paul says: *has come upon them the wrath.*

--What the wrath is, is a bit vague, but I think Paul's point is clear. The Jews who rejected their Messiah had passed into judgment. Paul was familiar with Jesus' assessment of the religious leaders as well as the OT prophecies of Israel's rejection of their own Messiah. ***Acts 28:23-29; Rom. 9:30-33; 10:21; 11:25-27***

--Paul is clear in **Romans 9-11** that God is not done with Israel, but they had come to a specific point of judgment in the work of God because of their sin.

****Romans 11:28: For concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.****

--The important point Paul is making though, is that he is thankful for the work of God in their lives in sustaining them (as the churches of believing Jews in Judea) through persecution from their own loved and cherished people.