

## **Lesson #2: I Thessalonians 2:1-16**

### **Introduction:**

Paul gave thanks to God for the Thessalonian church and reiterated their common bond in God in the first chapter.

In chapter two, Paul immediately attends to the personal attacks regarding his motivation. He was accused of being a charlatan preacher who showed love for them just long enough to take advantage of them and he was off to the next town.

The strategy by his opposition was simple: attack Paul's motives and his *teaching* would go down along with his reputation.

### **I The Preacher's Motives (2:1-10):**

#### ***1. For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,***

The "for" which begins this verse is connected to the idea that began in verse 1:9.

- Just as the outsiders spoke so well of the faith demonstrated by the Thessalonians, the Thessalonians would "know" first hand of the upbeat testimony given about them.

- Paul is calling the Thessalonians to be witnesses for his defense. This is nothing less than brilliant and masterful! The evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers is used as evidence of his authenticity and motivation.

- Paul argues that they themselves (the Thessalonians) knew first-hand that Paul's visit to them was not without purpose and result.

- Paul has cleverly made those who spoke well of them as well as the Thessalonians, witnesses for his defense.

1. How do you know the power of the gospel is not in vain in your life?

#### ***2. But 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.***

Paul recalls the treatment he received in Philippi prior to coming to Thessalonica. He had been physically beaten and verbally assaulted (Acts 16:20-24).

- Paul continues his argument all the meantime reminding them that they "know" that this happened. A con-man would have been discouraged from such a treatment (beating and jailing), but preachers convinced of their message would not. Paul and his companions were committed to the same message they proclaimed everywhere despite the reception their message received.

- But what is this message? It is as Paul puts it: "The gospel of God." But we must already read into what Paul is intimating. This "good news" that he proclaimed was not something that he contrived from his creative inventiveness, it is directly from God "It is about who God is and what God has done and what God offers.

2. Are you prepared to proclaim the message despite how it might move others to act against you?

3. How does knowing that this message is from God impact your answer?

**3. For our exhortation does not [come] from error or impurity or by way of deceit;**

It is here that we see for the first time what the *charges* are which Paul has to address. The charges are that he (1) speaks with error, (2) spiritual impurity, or (3) that he didn't really care about them, he was concerned with his well-being, perhaps lining his pocket by deceiving them.

4. Does the world raise similar arguments today?

**4. But 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.**

Paul's "but" could very easily be translated "on the other hand," he refutes the charges leveled in verse 3.

- Paul's message could not have been in "error" because it came from God. He was not impure because he was sent by God. Finally, he was not a con-man because the nature of his preaching was not designed to please man's ears but only God's.

- Paul conveys this message with a clear *conscience* because his motivation is to be a God-pleaser, and it is to Him whom we must answer as He is the one who "examines" and knows what is in our wills.

- Ultimately, the gospel we proclaim as Christians has to meet the standards of God, but if we water it down in order for it to be accepted, what does that make us? A man-pleaser.

5. Is the temptation to be a "man pleaser" something the church faces today?

**5. For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness--**

Paul primarily argued for the integrity of the message in verse 3 but in this verse he argues for the integrity of the preachers.

- "Never" covers the entire time that he was there, there was no time wherein his speech was deceitful.

- First he deals with flattery. He states plainly that he at no time used insincere speech to flatter them for his gain.
- Paul then goes on to state that the gospel message that he proclaimed, although it was true, was not a mask for Greed.
- Again, Paul refers back to their experience: “you know.” Their personal experience would attest to Paul’s motives.

6. Is the church accused of greed today? Why?

***6. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.***

Paul adds that neither did he seek the approval or acclaim of men. As an apostle he had the authority to command to be compensated in order to carry on ministry but he did not assert his right (I Cor 9:14).

***7. But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing [mother] tenderly cares for her own children.***

Paul likens his time with the Thessalonians to a mother with her children. A mother that tenderly nurses her children is not associated with taking advantage of them.

7. Is gentleness a quality that is valued in Pastors? Should it be?

***8. Having 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.***

How is one to distinguish between a “professional” preacher and a pastor? It is in the giving of himself to his sheep.

- The professional minister who is only concerned about how much money he makes without regard for his flock is one that is disingenuous, he is one that flatters only to get what he wants (v. 5).
- Paul encourages his readers to think back to the time when he was with them and recognize that not only had he preached the gospel but he had given of himself as well – just like a “mother tenderly caring for her children.”

8. Are pastor’s still called to care for their congregation in this manner?

9. What does this mean for the size and set up of a church?

**9. For 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.**

In order to overcome the charges of greed (v. 5) he urges them to remember his time among them. He did not play golf during the day, nor go shopping at the local mall for the latest golf clubs.

- Paul worked daily and toiled alongside them (probably as a tent-maker, which was his worldly vocation). He earned his own living while he proclaimed the gospel

## **II. The Minister's Behavior (2:10-12):**

**10. You are witnesses, and [so is] God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;**

Paul calls on the Thessalonians to attest to the conduct of Paul and his band while they were there.

- Devoutly has been translated from *holy*; Paul is referring to their piety.
- Uprightly has been translated from *justly*; he is referring to their obedience to the law.
- Finally, no complaints were ever lodged against their behavior.
- Paul continues to turn the Thessalonians from judges to friendly witnesses!

**11-12. Just as you know how we [were] exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father [would] his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.**

Switching his metaphor from a mother (v.7) to a “father,” he reminds them again (“just as you know”) that while he was with them he spurred, encouraged, and pleaded with them that they should live lives that are honoring to God.

- This is further evidence that Paul was not there just for the money. He was involved in their lives. Undoubtedly, he went from house to house encouraging, praying, and teaching each family, in other words caring for them.

10. Does a Minister's behaviour matter today? (1st Tim 3:1-8)

### **III. The Minister's Message (2:13-16):**

***13. For 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.***

Paul shifts from his ethics (behavior) to the message itself. Paul gives praise and thanks to God, for when the Thessalonians heard the gospel (Word of God) they accepted it; not as if it was some cleverly devised tale concocted in the mind of a mere man, but for what it was - the words of life.

- An evidence of the message being from God is the change (“work”) that it performs in the life of the believer
- Paul appeals to the changed lives as evidence of the truthfulness of what he was preaching and not some story designed to make money.

11. Do you see a change in your life?

12. What does this tell you about the truthfulness of the Gospel?

13. Is this change a one time event or ongoing?

***14. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they [did] from the Jews,***

As continued evidence of the change that the message wrought in their lives, Paul likens the church in Thessalonica to that of those in Judea. It was commonly attested that the churches in Judea were persecuted by the synagogues and the temple in Jerusalem – primarily for believing that the convicted insurrectionist Jesus was the Messiah.

14. What was Paul's role in the persecution in Judea?

- The Thessalonians were, evidently, being persecuted by their fellow countrymen just like the Christian Jews were being their fellow Jews.
- Scripture tells us that persecution (on some level) is the lot of Christians (II Tim 3:12). As Christians we are conforming into the image of our savior.

15. If we want to conform to the image of Christ, what should we expect?

**15-16. *who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.***

These two verses are the severest denunciation that Paul makes of the Jews; does he have in mind every non-converted Jew? Paul, elsewhere (Romans 9-11) doesn't speak of the Jews with such great condemnation, but instead with concern and hope.

- We are to understand then that Paul is making reference to *particular* Jews who have not only rejected the Messiah but persecuted his bride.
- What Paul says is ultimately true, when one rejects the Messiah, he is not pleasing to God, and when he puts a stop to the spread of the gospel he is hostile to all men. Why? because he has prevented others from entering the kingdom of God.
- The sins committed by those whom Paul is referencing, it seems, have filled their cup (with sin) to the brim – no room for a single drop left!
- The “wrath of God” must be understood in an eschatological context. The use of the past perfect tense (“has come”) is to be understood as not imminent but certain and complete

### **Conclusion:**

We are to remember that this world will come to an end and all those who have rejected Christ and persecuted his bride will on that Day of Judgment experience God's wrath (v. 16) for an eternity.

It's easy for us to develop an anger toward anyone who speaks or acts with ill-will toward our savior but we must temper our anger with the fact that without God's grace we would be no different.

Paul, I think, has very effectively and masterfully proven his case. If there were doubts about his motivation and his message he has dealt with it. His conduct with the Thessalonians and their personal experiences prove Paul's case.

This brings up an important point ....

16. How do our conduct, our message, and motivation affect our effectiveness in our personal outreach?

