

How the Gospel Was Brought to Thessalonica

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

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⁴ But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness— God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. ⁸ So, affectionately longing 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 dear to us. ⁹ For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; ¹¹ as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, ¹² that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

Background Notes

The church at Thessalonica was founded in about AD 50 on Paul’s second missionary journey. The gospel first came to Europe on this second journey, when the apostle Paul received the “Macedonian Vision” – a vision of a man begging him to “come over to Macedonia and help us.” So Paul and his evangelistic team crossed over the Aegean Sea and came to Philippi. There he and Silas preached the gospel - but it wasn’t long before they were beaten and thrown into prison because of their message.

You may remember the story of how Paul and Silas “counted it joy” to suffer for the Lord, and even sang hymns in prison! Let’s read the account in Acts 16:25-35: *“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your*

household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, “Let those men go.”

And then in Acts 17:1-2 the account continued: “... *they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.*” Paul referred to the events in Acts 16-17 in the first two verses of 1 Thessalonians 2: “*For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.*”

The persecution and conflict because of the gospel continued in Thessalonica. In fact, there Paul was accused by his antagonists of lying and using underhanded and deceitful methods! However, Paul set the record straight: “*For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit*” (v3). Note that his message was true - without error. His motivation in preaching was pure. Paul had no unclean or impure motives, such as financial gain, or to gain a fan club! And his method of presenting the message was above-board – he made no attempt to deceive his audience. I love the way the apostle Paul handled slander! We probably would have spent the whole letter to the Thessalonians defending ourselves – but not Paul! He didn’t waste a lot of time defending himself. He simply refuted any false charges and set the record straight. Then he continued to teach and edify the believers.

Paul’s method of handling slander reminds us of the way Nehemiah handled slander – ***short and sweet!*** In Nehemiah 6, when Nehemiah was falsely accused of trying to make himself king, he refuted the false charges against him and set the record straight - but while he did so, he never stopped doing the job God had given him. He never stopped building the wall of Jerusalem!

Nehemiah didn’t take time out to defend himself – and neither did Paul. The work of the Lord was never “hyphenated.” These men set an excellent example for us to follow!

Doctrinal Points

1. Christian leaders should be like “nursing mothers.”

Verse 7: “*But we were gentle among you, just like a nursing mother cherishes her own children.*” The illustration of a “nursing mother” conveys one who displays tender, loving, and unselfish care for her young children. A nursing mother doesn’t punch the clock, coming on duty and going off duty. She’s there for her child 24 hours a day. And she’s not a drill sergeant, always cracking the whip. No, a “nursing mother” cares tenderly for her young children. (And notice that Paul used the illustration of a *nursing* mother, not the mother of a teenager!)

Christian leaders should be like “nursing mothers.” It’s not easy. It’s a lot easier to bark out commands and demand obedience than to be gentle and patient.

This unselfish and caring devotion reminds us of our Lord’s tender loving care for us. We read of our Lord’s gentle and loving care in one of the Messianic “Servant Songs, Isaiah 42:3: “*A bruised reed He will not break, and a faintly burning wick He will not quench.*” Do you ever feel like a “dimly burning wick”? The Lord knows how to tenderly fan your spark back into flame. Do you ever feel like a “bruised reed”? The Lord knows how to gently bring healing to your soul. The Lord is tender in the way he deals with us. (And by the way - because of my name, Isaiah 42:3 is one of my favorite verses in the Bible!)

In 1 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul continued to emphasize his care and affection for the young believers: “*So, affectionately longing 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 dear to us.*” The apostle Paul risked his life to preach the gospel and disciple new believers, just as a “nursing mother” would give her own life for her child.

Would you go that far for a fellow believer? I know some church elders who would do this for the members of their congregation. Church leaders should be like nursing mothers.

2. Christian leaders should be like devoted fathers.

Verses 11-12: “*As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*”

A devoted father instructs his children. A devoted father trains his children. A devoted father corrects his children. A devoted father disciplines his children. A devoted father comforts his children. A devoted father encourages his children. A devoted father challenges his children. All of these ideas are involved in the concept that Christian leaders should be like devoted fathers.

My father was a devoted father. I was on my high school baseball team, and my father came to my games as often as possible, at sacrifice to his job. But even more important - as a Christian father, when I was in high school he challenged me about my Christian walk. One day we happened to be talking about a Christian writer who had died before he finished his set of commentaries on the Bible. I’ll never forget it - my father turned to me and said that maybe *I* should finish those commentaries! Wow! I was only in high school! My Dad certainly knew that I was not capable of writing commentaries at that stage of my life, but it was a challenge. It motivated me to grow as a Christian and to “*walk worthy*” of the Lord.

That was the kind of challenge the apostle Paul gave to the Thessalonian believers in verse 12: “*That you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*”

Christian leaders should be like devoted fathers. Devoted fathers instruct, train, discipline, comfort, encourage, and challenge their children. Folks, you should be very thankful for the leaders in your church - and other Christians - who are like devoted fathers. Christian leaders should be like devoted fathers.

Practical Application

Never preach for money or popularity!

Do you know any preachers who preach for money or popularity? Sadly, I'm sure you could name a few. Paul certainly didn't preach for popularity or money (v4-6)!

Paul didn't preach to please people or to gain popularity. He didn't use flattering words to manipulate people. He wasn't on an ego trip. And look at verses 9-10: *"For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe."*

Paul didn't send out letters to raise *personal* financial support. Even though he would have been within his rights to receive an honorarium from the young Thessalonian church for his preaching, he didn't take a dime from them! Instead, he worked. He worked day and night! Look at verse 9: *"For laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you."* Paul knew the tent-making trade (Acts 18), so perhaps during his stay in Thessalonica, he involved himself in tent-making to support himself.

Paul never preached for money or popularity. Those were never his motives. What an example for us! Although it's not wrong to receive a financial gift or an honorarium for preaching, money should never be our motive for preaching.

And we should never preach for popularity. That's not always easy to do. It's hard to include unpleasant - but biblical - truths in your messages! It's hard to teach truths that people don't like to hear, especially if those people support your ministry. After all, if you teach an "unpopular" truth that steps on their toes, you may lose their support!

But no matter what - we should **never** preach for the wrong motives. We should never preach for financial gain or for popularity!