

4] Entrusted with the Gospel (Sunday, November 29, 2020)

Scripture: 1 Samuel 12:1-12; 1 Thess. 2:1-9

Introduction

The truth of God's Word and Gospel does not depend upon us or others.

We can bring great shame to the name of the Lord through our behavior and actions.

We can bring great harm to others when we do not live according to the truth.

There is a great judgment that God brings to those who lead others astray.

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment

Here is another very sad thing to consider:

How much of Christian ministry is done out of ego, look at me, think highly of me?

There is a perversion that we too often see that we think God's grace and calling make us special, elevated, or superior to others.

The Christian life is not like the military where you work your way up into greater rank and privilege, such that others have to salute you and do your bidding.

Lord, forgive us, for acting in a way contrary to the gospel and your truth.

When you read the Bible, you have to be careful to not read yourself in as the central character.

So, for example as we read our text, we are not to think of ourselves as Paul, Silas, or Timothy.

The basic rule of interpretation always stands. What does the text say? What does it mean? How does it then apply to our different situations and callings?

So, we are not identical to Paul and the others. Our situations are much different, but there are several key attitudes and actions that stand out.

Sincerity, humility, sacrifice all connected with service for the gospel.

We will look at 1 Thess. 2:1-9 in two parts:

1] Our Coming Was Not in Vain, vv. 1-3

2] Entrusted with the Gospel, vv. 4-9

1] OUR COMING WAS NOT IN VAIN, vv. 1-3

What is going on in this passage?

What is the purpose for the defense of the ministry of Paul, Silas, and Timothy?

We are reading a little bit into the text, but likely during and after Paul and his team left Thessalonica, there were those who slandered their ministry.

The unbelieving Jewish leaders and perhaps others in Thessalonica attacked Paul, Silas, and Timothy in order to try to discredit the message and cause doubt among the believers in Thessalonica.¹

The NET Bible states:

Paul is defending himself against the charge that he lacked earnestness and personal concern for them, but appeared in their city out of greed or egotism. In his defense he appeals to what they recall of his ministry and what has become of it since he left, all of which demonstrates his God-given earnestness and effectiveness.²

It is not that Paul and the others have to defend themselves from attack.

What is their chief concern?

It is not themselves, but the truth of the gospel and the encouragement of the Thessalonian church.

The devil loves to plant and encourage doubt.

The devil loves to attack the truth by casting doubt on those who teach the truth.

Sadly, there are too many examples of false teachers or ministers who have not matched the truth with their own conduct.

Look at all the hypocrites in the pews and pulpits.

Paul and the others stress repeatedly in the first half of the book that the Lord did truly work in their lives through their ministry.

God's work was real.

¹ Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 13 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 51.

² W. Hall Harris, eds. *The NET Bible Notes*. 1st, Accordance electronic ed. (Richardson: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), paragraph 85091.

Our ministry was not a scam; it was not a show.

Look at verse 1 again.

For YOU yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

Our work was not a failure!

The word **coming** is the same word used in 1:9, our **manner of entry**.

And look ahead to 1 Thess. 3:5.

Paul's concern was that their labor was in vain, that they had been led astray by the tempter.

One of the things to observe from our text is the repeated use of the conjunction, but.

You see it at the start of verse 2.

Five times it is used in verses 1-9.

Strong contrasts are made.

Far from being in vain, their ministry was characterized by great boldness and courage and sincerity and honesty.

It was not an easy thing for Paul and his team to continue on in this mission.

In Acts 16:22-23 we have the record of Paul and Silas beaten with rods by the authorities in Philippi.

One writer comments on this;

The rods were usually made of birch wood, and the Roman soldiers would beat their victims mercilessly all over their entire body. The other frequent punishment with using rods was to bind the victims, lift them upside down with their feet exposed, and beat the bottom of their feet breaking the bones in the feet.³

How many of us would have continued on in ministry after something like this?

Their continued ministry in Thessalonica was a powerful witness to the truth especially since the ministry in Thessalonica was also involved great conflict or great agony.

Then in verse 3 they write: our exhortation, their preaching and application of God's word, did not come from error, moral uncleanness, or deceit. It was not a bait and switch operation.⁴

Sadly, we think how much of Christianity today is described by false teaching, perverted living, and deceptive practices!

Lord, protect us! Keep us from that which would bring great shame to your name and truth!

2] ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOSPEL, VV. 4-9

I would argue that verse 4 is the key verse in this section.

There are several significant words.

³ <https://dynamicsofgrowth.com/resources/free-tools/godmaps/beaten-with-rods/>

⁴ Morris, 53.

First, approved by God.

This same verb is used also later in this verse translated as **tests**. God tests our hearts.

This verb is also later used in 1 Thess. 5:21, translated as **examined**.

Paul and the others ultimately stand before the Lord not simply before men. God has given approval to their ministry.

Second, they have been entrusted with the gospel.

Gal. 2:7 But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as *the gospel* for the circumcised *was* to Peter

The verb entrusted is the verb **to believe**, but here the translated entrusted is best.

To be entrusted is to be given something of great worth giving you a great responsibility.

We are not just like the Apostle Paul and Silas and Timothy.

But you are to consider the blessings and privileges God has given to you.

If you believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you also have been entrusted with the gospel.

You have been given something of incredible responsibility for how you now live and share the truth with others.

For Paul, Silas, and Timothy they could say with total honesty, we speak as those given this great responsibility not focused on pleasing men but God who tests our hearts.

What is meant by pleasing men?

It is not that Paul and the others didn't have any care for others. No, they talk about just the opposite.

The meaning is whom are you ultimately serving?

If your goal is to get the approval of others as the most important thing, you act in one way.

When your goal is focused on doing God's will, then you act in a much different way.

What we have then in the following verses are several more negative statements, denials, followed by several positive statements, testimonies to how they conducted themselves.

What you see in these statements is a very profound understanding of false ministry vs. true ministry.

Nothing here has lost any relevance.

Let's consider the denials first, descriptions of false ministry.

Denial 1: We did not use flattery as a cloak for covetousness.

The word cloak is used 6 other times translated as pretense, a false motive.

Matt. 23:14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

Denial 2: We did not seek glory from men or make demands as apostles of Christ.

Aren't these verses a powerful description of our sinful human nature?

Isn't it so easy to seek the glory of men?

It seems that especially in Christian ministry, this becomes such a snare.

It is a great danger.

Along with this glory was how they treated others.

Even though they were apostles, that is sent forth on a specific mission by the Lord Jesus Christ, they did not push their rights.

Leon Morris writes very well on the nature of apostleship.

Apostleship was not so much the conferring of an honor on an outstanding servant of God as the laying of an obligation on him.⁵

Story from South Africa in 1995.

What follows are several positive statements or affirmations of how they did their work.

Affirmation 1: We were gentle and incredibly gracious, like a nursing mother with her children.

Given what Paul and Silas suffered, this is not a statement of being weak or effeminate, obviously.

It is a testimony of great love and concern for others.

You don't have to be a mother to appreciate the language of incredible concern for the well-being of others.

Cherishes - see also Eph. 5:29.

Eph. 5:29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and **cherishes** it, just as the Lord *does* the church.

⁵ Morris, 56.

MacArthur notes here:

Paul may have had in mind Moses' portrayal of himself as a nursing mother to Israel (cf. Nu 11:12). He used the same tender picture with the Corinthians (cf. 2Co 12:14, 15) and the Galatians (cf. Gal 4:19).

Affirmation 2: Out of deep love we shared the gospel and our own lives.

There are several words from verse 8 that are used also in Matthew 3:17 at the baptism of Jesus.

Matt. 3:17 And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

The word **dear** in our passage is the word beloved. And the word translated as **well pleased** is the same in both passages.

The word **dear** or **beloved** is used a number of times in Paul's other letters.

It shows a great bond that was formed by God's work of grace. It is a sign of the Lord's work and the love that should characterize how we deal with each other.

Paul and the others endangered their lives both to share the gospel and to give themselves entirely for the sake others.

Affirmation 3: We slaved away night and day so that we would not have to depend on you in order to preach the gospel to you.

The word remember in verse 9 connects back to chapter 1 and verse 3.

Paul and the others remembered the Thessalonians. Now they are calling for the Thessalonians to remember how they served and conducted themselves.

I shared some background information about Thessalonica in my earlier messages.

I did not comment on some of the industry and business that we know took place in the city.

Thessalonica we can say was a good fit for Paul's city-focused ministry.

The city had many artisans, manual laborers, sailors, and orators. Inscriptions mention the presence of Roman merchants and sea merchants. There were guilds for purple dyers, blacksmiths, and other dyers.

Some commentators suggest that when Paul and his team first arrived in Thessalonica that they would have established themselves in the business of tentmaking or leather work.

Jason who is mentioned in Acts 17 might have been a contact they made in terms of this work.

Paul and his team as I have translated slaved away in a difficult, manual labor of leather working so that they could support themselves and not have to in any way rely on the Thessalonians for their living expenses.

I can imagine that this meant 16-hour days of both physical labor and gospel ministry.

A very similar testimony is given in 2 Thess.

2Th. 3:8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,

Many cultures over time and even today look down on physical labor. Hard, physical work was for slaves or lower-class people to do.

We consider that Jesus worked physical labor as a carpenter or stone mason before starting His public ministry at the age of 30.

How could Paul and the others despise hard, physical work and follow after the Lord?

Lord, forgive us for being slack or lazy in your service.

CONCLUSION

- 1] The sins of pride, elevation, expecting others to serve you
- 2] The guard we must have against hypocrisy and scandal
- 3] The call for a spirit of hard work and giving of ourselves for others.
- 4] Importance of prayer for our own congregation and others we know

When your focus is on what Jesus Christ has done for you a sinner, then truly no love or sacrifice for others is too great.

When your focus is just on yourself or others, then anything seems like a great sacrifice.

Sincerity, humility, sacrifice all connected with service for the gospel.

Prayer

Hymn 496

BENEDICTION – EPH. 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.