

Gospel Authenticity Thessalonians 2:1-6

Our sermon text this morning is First Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 1 to 6. We're going to read from chapter 1, verse 9, down to chapter 2, verse 6, because what we're reading is a continuation of a thought that starts at First Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 1. So the sermon text, as I've said, is chapter 2, verses 1 to 6. We'll read from chapter 1, verse 9, down to chapter 2, verse 6. Before the reading we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we pray that you would bless your word to us now, and that we would be given ears that hear, and eyes that see, and hearts that understand and obey. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

First Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 9: "For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

Chapter 2: "¹For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ." Amen. And may God bless His word.

As I've already said, our text this morning continues on from that which came before. There's a thought there in chapter 1, verse 9—speaking of the reception that the preachers, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, had amongst the Thessalonians—and the thought is that it was not a wasted, or a worthless ministry. They had the reception among them of people who were turning to the living God. They saw the Thessalonians turn from idols to serve the living and the true God.

Paul then goes on in chapter 2, verses 1 to 6, to make a defense of their ministry. He makes a defense of their ministry. It's as though he expects that they have been attacked whilst they were absent from the Thessalonians. That would not be surprising. Consider how many of Paul's letters are written in response to troubles that come to the churches that he has planted on his missionary journeys. The letter to the Galatians is a prime example. He's planted churches in the region of Galatia, and following Paul are the false teachers.

The false teachers in Galatia were specifically Jews. Paul calls them the Judaizers, and they were seeking to twist the gospel that Paul had preached. They were seeking to lay upon the

Galatians the demands and the burdens of Jewish ceremonial law. They were basically saying, You can't be Christians without first you become Jews.

In Paul's defense to the Thessalonians, it doesn't seem that he's dealing with the same problem. We're not even given necessarily an understanding of exactly what he's dealing with, but it would appear from what he says that the accusation is that Paul and his two friends are nothing more or less than traveling philosophers, and that the Christians, the converts of Thessalonica, ought not to let their lives be so changed and so altered by the teaching of just some traveling philosophers.

Now what do I mean by "traveling philosophers"? Well, in the ancient world, you didn't have electronic media bringing your entertainment into your living room. If you wanted some entertainment from outside of your area, it had to come to you in the form of people. If you wanted teaching outside of your area, it came to you in the form of visiting teachers. And ancient Greece was filled with these men who had received some training in both philosophy and rhetoric. They were teachers who could speak well in public. They were teachers who could basically entertain people with their words.

A traveling comedian gives you some idea, although these people were not necessarily comics. A traveling actor, giving dramatic readings from poetry—which was something you would've heard in Australia, around about a century ago, the ability to read poetry publicly—was considered to be worthwhile skill, especially in rural areas. That's kind of what we're getting at.

And these philosopher-teachers, these popular speakers, the way they sort of worked was, before they would come into a town, their flunkies would go into a town, into the marketplaces, drop their name, speak of how intelligent they were, how worth hearing they were, how well they spoke, how entertaining it was to hear them speak. And then, of course, the people would wait for them to come and then turn up, and these people would lecture. And they'd lecture on all kinds of different things—on gods, and true worship, and all sorts of stuff. They'd lecture on anything that might have been of interest at the time.

And it would appear, as I've said, that the attack that Paul was dealing with is the attack that he and his friends are just another bunch of traveling philosophers. So you could imagine what's being said to these young Christians in their church: "Why have you allowed these guys to turn your life upside down? Where are they now? They came, they spoke, they've gone. Why don't you just fit back in? Why don't you just start behaving as you used to behave? Life was so much easier then." And so Paul's defense is, "No, we're not that kind of person."

I couldn't help but wonder—I don't know if you remember it, back in the early nineties, there was a Steve Martin movie called "The Leap of Faith." I don't know if you remember that movie, if anyone's seen it. In it, Steve Martin played basically a false Pentecostal-type preacher who was traveling from town to town, putting on a show where he supposedly was preaching the gospel, and people supposedly were being healed. It was just a show, really. It was just entertainment. There's a line in the show where Steve Martin, in defense of what he's doing,

says to the local sheriff, “Look, people come along, they pay some money, and they get a couple hours of entertainment, and they go home with a smile on their face. What’s so wrong with that? What’s so wrong with that?” And that’s kind of the accusation that seems to have gone Paul’s way. “What kind of men are these? They’re in it for their own reward. They’re in it for their own satisfaction. Don’t take them too seriously.”

These would be attacks that are inspired by the Devil himself. The Devil does not want growing churches, especially in openly idolatrous cities. You know, these places—think of them as gateways to hell, doorways of the underworld. People go from those cities into hell via the worship of idols, and the unclean spirits of hell itself come to them the same way, through that open doorway of idol worship. And so, Satan doesn’t want to see a church appear there, and he is in this world like a roaring lion. He’s seeking those whom he can devour. So the apostles come under attack wherever they go.

In Second Corinthians chapter 2, verse 11, Paul speaks of a thing that he calls “the designs of Satan.” Now in that context, he was speaking of troubles in a church and whether or not they should restore a repentant sinner. These things he calls “the designs of Satan.” And in Second Corinthians chapter 10, verses 3 to 5, he tells the Corinthians that we’re not dealing with physical things here; that the warfare that we wage is spiritual; that what we’re trying to do is bring down vanity, bring down vain ideas and make all things subject to the word of God. And I think here, this is where we see that in a place like Thessalonica, Paul is fighting the same battle.

Let’s get down and into it. Let’s start there at chapter 2 and verse 1. Paul says, “For *you yourselves know*, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.” You yourselves know. Now notice, he says almost the same thing three times in our passage. Look at verse 2, around about halfway through verse 2: We had “been shamefully treated at Philippi, *as you know*.” And then look at verse 5, once again about halfway through verse 5: “For we never came with words of flattery, *as you know*.” “You yourselves know, brothers. For you yourselves know.”

What’s he saying here? Well, my friends, when you start to hear about other people, when you start to hear about other churches, when you start to hear about problems, we need to remember some things. We need to ask some questions. Is this firsthand information? Are we dealing in facts? See, Paul is mounting a defense of their ministry, and so the first question that he asks the Thessalonians is, “Are you dealing in facts? Are you dealing in the things that you know firsthand?”

The Ninth Commandment is, You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not bear false witness. Paul is saying, “Are you dealing in facts? What were we like? Don’t worry about what is being said to you. What were we like when we were there? What do you know firsthand?” Anyone who’s been involved in churches for any period of time would tell you, if only the people who are in churches and who call themselves Christians would simply remember this—to deal in facts. What do you know? What has been established firsthand? What do you know? A whole lot of troubles in a whole lot of churches simply would not exist.

There's too many half-truths floating around. There's too much vain conjecturing—people imagining that they understand the thoughts and the motivations of a person's heart, people imagining that they know people better than they know themselves, because “Someone said something to me, and I heard from over there that this was said by someone else. And over there, that was said by someone else.” And of course, wherever there's smoke there's fire.

If you've been on the end of that, it's not a nice feeling. If you've been the receiving party of that kind of slanderous attack, it's not a nice feeling. And what you want to say to everyone is, “What do you know? What do you know firsthand? What did you see with your own eyes? What do you know in your own personal dealings with the person whom you're talking about?”

“For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.” Was not in vain. Now that word “vain” can have two meanings. I think both of them probably work, and Paul probably deliberately put that word in there with its double meaning. It can mean, “We did not come to you empty.” We did not come to you with emptiness. We didn't come to you with nothing. Our coming to you was not in vain, we brought something to you. The word can also literally mean, “no return on labor—worked for nothing. A whole lot of effort, and it all flushed down the drain.” You would use that word the same way.

So he's seeming to say to them, “We brought you something, and there was actually return on our labor. We brought something to you. That something was effective. We saw return for our efforts.” So he's saying, “Remember this. We didn't come to you with nothing. There was something there. When we were preaching the gospel, remember? There was power. There was the power of the Holy Spirit. There was great assurance. You repented. You turned from idols to serve the living God. Remember our coming amongst you was not a waste of time.”

Looking on to verse 2: “But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know”—you see, “as you know.” You see what he's saying—the accusation is that Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy are in this for what they can get out of it.

Now I don't know whether they're in the habit of passing a plate around to receive offerings, or if people were simply making freewill offerings to them, supporting them for preaching the gospel. I've got no idea. We're not told that here in this text. But that's the attack. Traveling teachers did pass the bag around. Traveling teachers were teaching, hoping to receive from the people to whom they were speaking something that they could put in their purse, or in their pocket and walk away with.

“But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi.” He's saying, “Remember, we got nothing out of Philippi, and we've taken nothing out of you. We came to you with the gospel. You were converted under our preaching.” If we were in this for what we could get out of it, Paul's saying, there are a lot better ways and a lot more profitable ways to use our talents.

“We were shamefully treated. We were illegally treated,” as we just read. Remember, they were dragged before the magistrates. They weren’t even given the chance to testify. It wasn’t a trial, it was a kangaroo court. They were accused, and having been accused, they were beaten for no other reason, apparently, than that they were Jewish. Paul says. “This was shameful treatment. We’re Roman citizens. This should not have happened.”

“As you know, we had boldness in our God.” We had boldness in our God. You know, once again, Paul’s saying, “Where do we get the boldness to preach to you the message that we brought you? If there’s nothing in it for us, if we’re hated wherever we go, if there is trouble wherever we preach, why do we still preach with boldness? Why do we still speak with clarity? We had it because it came from God. We had boldness in our God.” These are the same people, back at First Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 1, that Paul said were the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We opened our service this morning reading from Isaiah 55 of the word of God, how it goes out from God and it returns to God, and along the way, it accomplishes the purposes for which it was sent forth. Well notice, here is an example. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy turn up preaching the gospel, which comes from God. It’s preaching with the boldness that they had in God, which plants a church in Thessalonica, which is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A word went forth from God, accomplished the purpose for which it was sent. It captured people, so to speak. It captured Thessalonians and it brought them into God. The word did that for which it was sent forth. “We had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.” There was trouble in Thessalonica. Remember in Acts chapter 7, they were once again accused. Once again, there was almost a riot. There was trouble. “But we preached in the midst of much conflict.”

Notice where this gospel comes from—“the gospel of God.” The gospel of God. Just turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 1, and look at verse 1. Romans 1, verse 1: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for *the gospel of God*.” Now stay in the book of Romans and turn to the last chapter, chapter 16. Then look at verse 25: “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to *my* gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages.” The gospel of God is Paul’s gospel.

You see what Paul’s saying. He’s brought to the Thessalonians the gospel of God; it’s his gospel. It’s important, my friends, that the person who is preaching is so identified with the message that they’re preaching that it’s part of themselves. It’s Paul’s gospel. Paul’s bringing them a word. Paul’s preaching the gospel to them. He says in Romans 16:25, “My gospel.” Romans chapter 1, verse 1, it’s the gospel of God. The gospel that Paul preaches has become so much a part of him, that though it is the gospel of God, it is his own gospel. He owns it, in a manner of speaking. He’s identified with it.

The gospel of God “preached in much conflict.” Once again, the question is asked, “If we were self-serving, why would we do this? If we were in this for what we can get out of it, why would

we come to a place like Thessalonica and preach in the midst of conflict? We're not getting much out of this," he says, "except the satisfaction of knowing that we are serving God."

Let's move on into verse 3. First Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 3: "For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive." The accusation must therefore be that there is error, impurity, and deception in their ministry. "There's no error," he's saying. "We know the truth. We've been taught the truth by God."

Remember, Paul receives his gospel, so to speak, from Jesus Himself. Paul has received Jesus' gospel from Christ Himself. That's the claim that he makes in the book of Galatians—that he was taught the gospel by Christ. There is no error. There is no impurity. "Impurity," well that word could mean impure according to Jewish law, but it can also simply mean general impurity. I think that's what he's getting at here. We weren't doing it to impress the ladies. We weren't doing it to pick up the chicks. Okay, there was no impurity. We had no desires here, as we came to you to preach the gospel. There was no error, there was no impurity, we were not attempting to deceive you. There was no deception."

Reading on into verse 4: "But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts."

Okay, let's have a look at a couple of words here. The word "approved"—"but just as we have been approved"—and the word "tests" at the end of verse 4, "God who tests our hearts"—same root Greek word in both instances. "Approved"—it means to be tested like metal. It means basically to have been put through the furnace and purified, to have been made pure.

You see what Paul's saying. He's saying that the conflict and the trouble that he's preaching in, the conflict and the troubles that he is dealing with, these are the purifying fires of God that purify the message, or the preachers of the message. "We have been approved," tested and proved, tested like metal put through the furnace. "Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel." "Entrusted" means simply to be found faithful. "God has tested us," he's saying, "and we have been found faithful under testing."

If anyone wants to actually be a genuine preacher of the gospel, you're going to find that that person will be tested. It's usually not a smooth and easy life for someone who really dedicates themselves to understanding and teaching the Scriptures. The testing that God poured out upon Job, the testing that God poured out in the New Testament upon someone like Paul, God still pours that testing out on Christians today. Christians are still tested.

Turn to the book of Acts, and look to Acts chapter 9. Acts chapter 9 tells us of the conversion of the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. We'll start reading at verse 10:

"¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, 'Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is

praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.’ ¹³ But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.’ ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’”

Isn't it interesting in verse 15, the Lord seems to be speaking of a great and fruitful ministry. The Lord says, “He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name.” The Old Testament background of telling someone that they are a chosen instrument to carry the name of the Lord to the world before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel—the Old Testament implications of that are enormous, that someone is to carry the name of the Lord before Gentiles into the courts of kings.

Basically, it's saying that “Paul is going to be like one of my prophets. Paul is going to be like one of my chosen servants from what we would call the Old Testament, from the Hebrew Scriptures. He's going to carry my name.” But look at verse 16. This chosen instrument is going to suffer for the sake of my name. “For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

My friends, none of us really want to suffer for the sake of the name of God. It's just a fact. It's not built into us to desire to suffer, and those who do desire to suffer probably have something wrong with them. No one wants to suffer. No one looks for troubles and for testings. But it is just simply a fact that if we want to be true preachers of the gospel, if we want to carry the name of God before the nations, He is going to test us. We're going to go into the melting pot. We're going to be purified by the fire and the power of God's Holy Spirit. These things must happen.

The easy ride is not the Christian ride. The easy path is not the path that God has chosen for His people. These preachers—you know, the smile forever on their face, telling you that all you have to do is follow their formula, follow their six points to happiness, follow their seven points to a perfect marriage, how to be successful parents, on and on and on the list goes. They know nothing of Scripture. They understand nothing of what God is saying here through Paul and to Paul. They understand nothing of it.

God says He tests. He tests the heart. God says He purifies. God says He breaks down that which needs to be broken down in order that He can build up that which needs to be built. And Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy had been tested, and they had been purified, and they had been entrusted with, or found faithful in the preaching of the gospel.

I know I often say this, but I really do honestly believe the day is coming when such testing will be commonplace once again. The world is getting more and more aggressive towards Christians, more and more aggressive towards proclamation.

Think of the fuss and the bother about Israel—I can never say his name—*Fall-ow*, I think is how you say his name, Israel Folau—that’s gone on in the last week. What did he do? On Twitter, he basically typed out or published a paraphrase of a passage from First Corinthians chapter 6. And at the end of it he said, “Hell awaits those who disobey.” Simple as that.

Less than fifty years ago, no one would have blinked an eye at any Christian saying that in any public format, any public place. No one would have blinked an eye. It was understood. That was the teaching of Scripture. Now I’m not saying everyone was faithful back then. But it was understood that that’s what the Bible taught, and Christians, if they were honest, would say such things. Well now you would think it’s never been heard or said before, that it’s the most evil word that ever came out of anyone’s mouth or that was ever published in any electronic media.

Good for him, I say, good for him. We finally got a high-profile Christian who has the courage to speak the truth and who’s willing to suffer for speaking it. Good for him. So often, we get these high-profile converts and they’re useless. And the truth is, they just simply see Christianity as a way to testify to the world of their own goodness and their own niceness. “Not only am I a good sportsman, but I’m a nice guy who prays.” Good for him that he speaks the truth.

Uphold him in prayer, my friends. I pray that he’s faithful. He’s put his name out there, he’s put his face out there, and he’s taken the hits. We, as Christians, had better be praying for him. I pray that he never backs down, never. If anything, if they push, he pushes back. That’s what I pray he does. Okay, he’s being tested now in the fire. God’s testing him. We should be praying for him. He’s going to lose his profile as first-grade footballer. It’s just about gone already. Good. Good. I hope he’s willing to let it go and serve Christ. He will be an embarrassment and a shame to us if he turns back. Pray for him. Uphold him. God is now testing his heart.

Let’s move on into verse 5 of First Thessalonians chapter 2. “For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness.” For we never came with words of flattery. The gospel doesn’t appeal to our selfish desires. What Paul’s saying is that he didn’t come to the Thessalonians and tell them that they were good people, that all was well, that you’re good people and all you have to do is just be a little bit better. Try a little bit harder, do a little bit more. You’re already on the right path. Walk a little bit faster.

The gospel is not, “Go further, try harder, do more.” That’s not the gospel, though that is what so many people hear taught. Try harder, go further, do more. Trying harder, going further, and doing more are fruits of genuine salvation. They’re the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. But there’s no point telling people to try harder, go further, and do more, if they’re not actually saved.

Paul didn’t come flattering them. He didn’t come telling them they were good people with nothing to worry about. He told them they were idolaters. He told them God will judge their behavior, God will judge them for the things that they do, for the words that they speak, that God will judge them for choosing to follow after worthless nothings, that God is indeed returning. Remember, Paul’s already mentioned the fact that Jesus is returning, and at the end of chapter 1,

verse 10: “who delivers us from the wrath to come.” He’s already warned them. He didn’t come to them flattering. Flattery is not a good thing. People saying good things to you is not a good thing.

You know what a salesman does, if he’s a good salesman—you know, the car salesman, that kind of person—they try and work out what kind of person they’re dealing with to say the things that that person wants to hear. A customer walks in at 9:00 o’clock. The customer’s wearing some kind of clothing that indicates some particular political bent. Let’s say they’ve got a Greenpeace badge on. Let’s say they’ve got a peace symbol somewhere else on another part of their clothing, or whatever.

Well, the salesman sits there, and he thinks, “Okay. This person is most likely going to be voting left, they’re going to be particularly concerned about the environment and social justice.” And he deals with them accordingly. And one way or another, he says things that he knows that they will agree with. “Well, you know, the reason that you should buy this semi-electric car is that its carbon output is very low.” He’s flattering. He’s picked his mark, and he’s working out how to deal with that person in the way that they want to be dealt with. “After all, we’ve all got to look after the earth. The whole future depends upon it, doesn’t it?” That’s the customer at 9:00 o’clock.

Another customer walks in at 11:00 o’clock. Looks like a businessman. Looks like he’s wealthy. He’s brought a trade-in in. It’s a V8 Mercedes. “Hmm, okay. I’ll deal with this person in a different way. He’s a conservative person, I imagine. He wants business to go well.” And so he’s, you know, “How are you, sir? We’ve got some lovely cars here today. Top of the range just here—the luxury, the leather seats. Yes, I know the election’s coming up soon. Certainly it’s a good time to buy because prices are probably going to go up if So-and-So gets into power. And we don’t want that, do we?” And he says what he thinks the person wants to hear. That’s what a salesman does. It’s called flattery.

I hope you want to hear your gospel, and I hope you don’t want to hear preachers tell you that you’re good and lovely and you got nothing to worry about. If you want people to praise your character, well, you don’t really want to hear the gospel. We’re not good and lovely. We’re sinners. You know those things called the Ten Commandments? We break them. Even if we’re restrained from breaking them in action, we break them in thought. We break them in word. Even if we don’t outright commit adultery, we’ve got dirty minds. Even if we don’t lie in business, we exaggerate in conversation. We break—we break the commandments.

And Paul doesn’t come to people preaching a gospel that flatters them and tells them they’re good. He doesn’t tell people they’re good. If he walked in here today, he wouldn’t be telling us that we’re good and that he’s very happy with our goodness. He’d say it’s good that you’re Christians, it’s good that you’ve gathered under the word of God. But don’t for one moment imagine that you’ve got righteousness of your own.

Paul in Romans chapter 7 says, “One thing I know, no good thing dwells within me, that is, within my flesh.” If he says that about himself, what does he say about us? It’s pretty easy to understand, isn’t it? We all, like Paul, are supposed to be confessing that we know no good thing dwells within us, that is, within our flesh. The gospel doesn’t start with flattery. The true gospel is actually a bitter pill.

“For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness.” A pretext for greed—a covering, a cloak. It could say, “We had greed hidden under an outer layer.” Paul says we didn’t come to you that way, we didn’t come looking for your money, we didn’t come looking for your offerings. Notice then he says, “God is witness.” He’s saying, “You know it and God knows it.” Three times in our passage, he tells them, “You know it,” and now he tells them, “Furthermore, God knows it. Don’t listen to liars. God knows the truth.”

Moving on to verse 6: “Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.” Nor did we seek glory from people. Once again, there’s this addictive desire to hear praise from people. It’s terrible.

You know, today, here we are. I’m preaching to you guys. I’m recording the sermon. It’s going to go up on the Internet. Occasionally, I get feedback from all over the place. I’ll confess before you that sometimes I like that too much. I’ve learnt to try and ignore it, to just let it slide. Sometimes I like that feedback too much. We should not be seeking glory from people.

Turn to the gospel of John, John chapter 5. We’ll look at verses 41 to 44. We’ll start reading at verse 39. John chapter 5, verse 39, Jesus speaking to the Jews who were criticizing Him for healing on the Sabbath Day. John chapter 5:39:

“³⁹ You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. ⁴¹ I do not receive glory from people. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

There it is. Here’s one of the ways that Jesus knows the people to whom He’s speaking are not the people of God. Look at verse 42: “I know that you do not have the love of God within you.” You seek the glory from men that comes only from God. Verse 44: “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

Remember, Paul has said, “You know...,” “You know...,” “You know...” Well he’s saying, “One of the things you know is that we were not seeking praise. Not only did we not flatter you, we did not come seeking glory from you. We did not come expecting you to bend the knee before us. We did not come expecting you to serve us, as though we were the Lord Himself. We were not seeking glory from men.” There’s a similar point made in chapter 12 of the gospel of John. We won’t turn to that one this morning.

The seeking of glory from men. If we are seeking glory from people, we're not actually going to receive the glory that comes from God. That's the warning of Scripture. The only glory that's worth receiving is the recognition that God makes of those who are His own people. "Well done, faithful servant"—that's the only glory that any Christian should ever want to hear. We want the reward that comes from God, we want the recognition that comes from God, and if any of us are doing anything in the service of the kingdom of God in the hope that we ourselves will receive glory for what we do, we're fools and we're nothing like what God says we ought to be. Do not seek glory from people, as Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy were not seeking glory from people. It's a poisonous well to drink from. It will destroy us. It will destroy any of us. It will harden our hearts and it will blind our eyes.

How many Christians fall into sin with the thought that "I have done enough; therefore, I should be allowed my little indulgence"? Don't think people don't think that way. I know that they do. I actually know it firsthand, I've heard of it, I've had to deal with it in people's lives. "I work hard enough. The Lord gets my hours every day of the week, and now why shouldn't I do whatever? He will understand. Why shouldn't I do whatever?" Usually that "whatever" will in some way be the breaking of a commandment of God. Firsthand information—I know of an elder who honestly felt that because the Bible study he was conducting with a young woman was so holy and so blessed, that it was fair enough that they would sleep together afterwards.

Seeking the glory that comes from men—seeking recognition, seeking something for yourself, imagining that somehow or other, the things that we do entitle us to some kind of indulgence—that's actually Roman Catholic theology. That's what drove Martin Luther to separate from the Church of Rome, the idea of an indulgence. I mean, it was just a business transaction by that stage—drop your money in the chest, you get your printed indulgence, and you go and sin freely. That mindset still exists—the idea that you can do something to earn indulgences, or to earn the forgiveness of God. We don't, never, ever!

God does not look upon our sin as something that is weighed in the scales. "Oh look, he is such a good person; she is such a good person. It's okay. We'll let it slide." No. God hates sin, my friends. God hates sin. He hates sin and sinners get burnt in hell for all of eternity. That's the way it works. And God expects His people, His Christians, to be repentant of their sins.

Don't ever imagine that somehow or other it's just a small thing, it doesn't really matter. How often have you had that thought? "It's just a small thing. It doesn't really matter. I'll sin and God will forgive me, and life will go on." Heaven help us. We should never have such thoughts. We need to repent of thinking that way. I've thought that way, I'm sure you have thought that way at times, whatever it may be that you're thinking of right now. We may not be committing the same sins, but just remember, sins draw down the same judgment. We don't have the right to think that way.

Okay, every sin matters. If you're taking grace for granted, it's no longer grace. If you're taking grace for granted, you no longer fear God, you're no longer worshipping God, you're no longer

acknowledging the holiness of God. If you're taking grace for granted, you're actually not thinking like a Christian.

Let's look at the last part there of verse 6: "though we could have"—You see what he's saying—"though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ." Though we could have. He's saying, "It wouldn't have been wrong for us to expect you to support us. It wouldn't have been wrong for us to expect you to provide our needs. We could have, but we didn't." And remember, three times he said to them, "You know, You know, You know "You know we didn't come to you seeking from you what we could get out of you, though as apostles, we could have expected something. We had the right to expect something."

In First Corinthians chapter 9, Paul does tell the Corinthians that it would not be wrong for them to pay the people who preach the gospel. It's not wrong for them to support those who preach the gospel, and those who preach the gospel have the right to expect that support. But remember, Paul is defending himself here against the attack that he's a charlatan, that he's a pretender, that he's in it for what he can get out of it.

Let's have a look at the very last part there of verse 6, First Thessalonians 2, "as apostles of Christ." Now we need to think about that. It's definitely in the plural, so Paul is saying in a way that Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy are apostles. And we need to ask, okay, What's this all about?

There are a lot of people in the world today that call themselves apostles, especially in certain Pentecostal/charismatic kinds of environments. They claim to be apostles, if you look them up on the Internet—you know, the apostle from Nairobi, the apostle from Nigeria, etc., etc., etc. In its simplest meaning, an apostle is simply someone sent out to speak on behalf of someone else—someone sent to speak on behalf of someone else.

If you arranged for a person to attend the annual general meeting of a company in which you own shares, that they could vote on your behalf upon hearing the things that were said, in a way, that person is acting as your apostle. They've been sent from you, they can express your will concerning a certain thing, they can speak on your behalf. In a way, they're an apostle. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, Paul is saying all three of them are sent out with a message from God. They've been sent to preach, or to speak, on behalf of God.

And so, in a way, we can say every Christian is an apostle—small "a". It's not a title. It's like saying every Christian is a saint. Every Christian is sent, whether you're sent into your own family to preach the gospel to your own children, if you are a parent, you're sent to do it by God. You've got a word that comes from God, for the people whom God has put before you. In a manner of speaking, you could be called an apostle. Nevertheless, Scripture does indeed set a distinction between *the* Apostles—we might say the capital-A Apostles—and other Christians. Paul's not saying that Silvanus and Timothy are of the twelve. Let's just clear that up.

Look at a couple of Scriptures. Book of Acts chapter 6, from verse 1: "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews

because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.’”

Notice there’s twelve. There is a specific designated number of twelve. In this instance, it includes Matthias, who was chosen to replace Judas. Twelve apostles, twelve specific leaders. The most important thing that these twelve can do is what? Preach the word of God. It’s so important that it would not be right for them to be distracted from doing that. They should be preaching the word of God.

Turn now to the book of Revelation in chapter 21. We want to look at verse 14. We’ll start reading at verse 9. Revelation 21, reading from verse 9: “Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— ¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

What’s the point? There are definitely twelve apostles of the Lamb, and those twelve apostles in this vision of a city had their names on the twelve foundations of the city. There are definitely twelve apostles. And Paul calls himself the apostle who was born out of time, or the apostle who was born like an abortion. Paul is also an apostle because he personally met the Lord Jesus, and personally saw the Lord Jesus raised, and the other apostles recognized Paul’s apostleship. Yet, there are twelve apostles appointed by God. The teaching of the apostles is the word of God.

If you want to turn back now into First Thessalonians chapter 2. So though Paul ascribes to Silvanus and Timothy the title of apostles, he’s not saying they’re of the twelve. It’s important to understand that.

And I would tell you, do not trust anyone that comes claiming to be an apostle. They’re usually meaning more than just a Christian, all right? When they say that Apostle So-and-So, Apostle Reverend So-and-So—and I’ve read such titles on the Net—don’t trust them. Put your hand in your pocket, over your wallet, and leave it there, and hold your wallet and walk away. Okay? They’re after something. They’re actually the opposite to what Paul has just said that he is.

These have come with a cloak covering their greed. They have come seeking the glory from men that they should only receive from God. They have come as liars and as pretenders and as actors. They have come with impurity and uncleanness and error and deception. Okay, there are no apostles in the world today, not in terms of a title. That’s basically why we don’t use it. You know the word “saint” has been poisoned by the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches—a saint is a “special” Christian. No, in the Bible, a saint is any Christian.

Well I'm telling you now that the word "apostle," it's not poisoned. If it's a capital "A" it's one of the twelve, one of the twelve appointed and ordained by Jesus. And in any other context and in any other circumstance, an apostle is simply someone who's sent forth with a message on their lips. And that's every single Christian, full stop. That's it.

My friends, as I close, I simply want to say that those who preach the gospel ought to have been tested. Their hearts are to be tested, purified. And they're to have been found faithful, to have come through that testing—to come through and on to the other side of it, and they are to have been people who have survived the testing. Preachers should not seek glory. Preachers should not seek glory from their churches, from their listeners, from the world around them.

Think of the things that you know. Think of the things that you know, as our text has said this morning three times—"you know, you know, you know." Deal in facts. Deal in certainties. What do you know? You know that Jesus is the Son of God. You know that He died for your sins. You know that the word of God is true.

My friends, remember that the gospel comes to us from God through God's appointed preachers; it comes to us through the word of God; that God Himself is the owner, or the author of the church; that the church is located in God; that the word which shapes, forms, creates, and builds His church is the word that comes from God and goes back to God, and accomplishes the purpose for which it was sent. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do thank you for your word, and we do pray, Father, that as we have been sent out to preach the gospel, that we would be faithful and true, and that we would communicate the truth as you have expressed it through your word. We pray, Father, that we would not seek the glory that comes from man, but that we would seek only the glory that comes from you, and that you would own us as your people, and that you would empower our gospel, that our preaching would not be in vain. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.