

Paul's Work Among the Thessalonians
(1 Thessalonians 2:1-16)

INTRODUCTION:

1. The dedication to the Lord and the souls of men that directed Paul and his preaching companions is clearly on display here in 1 Thessalonians 2 where he addresses their work at Thessalonica.
2. In in this chapter we will examine what appears at first glance to be a *defense* of the work of Paul, Timothy, and Silas in Thessalonica, while a closer look may reveal it to be something more.
 - A. If this is a defense, who is doing the attacking.
 - i. The book of Acts shows they had trouble while at Thessalonica that followed them to Berea.
 - ii. If there are opponents at Thessalonica at the time of Paul's writing, we can't determine who they are because the telltale signs are not there—no statements about the law and Judaizing teachers, about the character of those attacking them, etc.
 - B. Instead, I might suggest this section to be a statement of *assurance* that *distinguishes* Paul and company's heart and purpose in preaching from the many charlatans and philosophers that roamed the cities at that time.
 - i. Paul may have felt them to be a danger for these brethren if he did not do so.
 - ii. And, it could also serve as exhortation for these brethren to *follow their example*, seeing Paul uses their behavior as examples of how to live in 2 Thess.
 - C. Either way, Paul expresses some heart-felt words concerning:
 - i. His group's motives (2:1-6) and conduct (2:7-12) as disciples of Christ among them.
 - ii. Their deep thanks for these brethren's response to the gospel and their discipleship that followed (2:13-16).
3. Hopefully by considering these 16 verses we can come to better appreciate and apply the demands of discipleship to our lives and live more devoted lives to God.

BODY:

I. Paul's addresses his group's work in the gospel at Thessalonica (2:1-12):

Note: There are four "fors" in these twelve verses touching on four different topics.

- A. 1st: **For**, the Thessalonian's knew what kind of men they were and their boldness in the work they did among them (2:1-2).
 1. Starting here at **2:1** is disjointed; so we need to step back to chapter 1.
 - a. Earlier Paul addressed their becoming followers of them and the Lord (1:6) and how the Thessalonian's obedience proved the truth of their purpose/conduct among them (1:9).
 - b. In 2:1 Paul continues to assure them of their stand in Christ by reminding them of what they *knew*—that their coming was "not in vain," or *empty of conviction* or *godly motives*.
 2. To assure them, Paul reminds them of his company's bold preaching (2:2).
 - a. Paul's party suffered in Philippi yet continued to preach in Thessalonica despite definite conflict from without (persecution) and possibly also from within (Gr. *agoni*).
 - b. Point: If they were charlatans like the philosophers or false teachers of the day, or evil men like certain accusers *may* have stated, why continue to preach and suffer for it?!
 - c. NOTE: Here is a pretty good starting point for judging me, your teachers, and brethren—whether the truth is stood for despite it being unpopular or opposed!
- B. 2nd: **For**, Paul, Silas, and Timothy were **responsible to God** to preach the *truth* as it was entrusted to them, pleasing Him who tests the heart and not men (2:3-4).
 1. Why bring this up except to either explain their boldness or to describe their pure character and motive which guided them in all they did, which is likely the best explanation.
 2. Their preaching didn't come from...(2:3).
 - a. **Error**, or a strong delusion (2 Thess. 2:11) – it was *truth* from God (see 2:4).
 - b. **Uncleanness**, or impure motives or life, but followed the purpose of the word (1 Tim. 1:5 – "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith.").
 - i. This would contrast their *purpose* with the Charlatans that were often immoral.

- ii. Paul and company *may* have been accused of immoral actions by some unknown opponents; but accusers often lie...as they would be here!
 - c. **Deception**, or craftiness designed to catch the Thessalonians by deceit. They believed with all their hearts in the gospel message they preached.
 - d. NOTE: Here is more criteria by which to test one another—are we convicted of the truth and do we seek to live pure and honest live as followers of it!
 - 3. In contrast to these three negatives, Paul states how they were *approved* by God to preach the gospel and sought in all they did to please God who knew their hearts (2:4).
 - a. These men were qualified to preach because they had been *tested, approved* (by testing and examination), and being found faithful were *entrusted* by God with the gospel.
 - b. NOTE: You should judge a preacher/teacher by whether the gospel is taught *as it has been entrusted/revealed in the Bible*, and brethren by their willingness to accept it.
- C. 3rd: **For**, the Thessalonians knew they were entrusted as stewards of God’s gospel by how they approached their work while among them (2:5-8).
1. Paul’s company *never* used flattering or dishonest words to ingratiate themselves, nor did they use their preaching as a cloak, or cover, for greedy intentions (2:5).
 - a. Charlatans use flattering words to cover their desire to exploit their hearers.
 - b. The Thess. had observed their actions and knew there was no covetousness.
 - c. Yet, because these brethren could not see in their hearts, Paul calls *God as a witness* to their purity of motive.
 2. Paul’s company never sought personal glory from them or others, even though they might have demanded it as *apostles* of Christ (2:6-7).
 - a. Seeking *glory* refers to either gaining glory by *pleasing men*, or more likely by *demanding certain honor/respect inherent in being apostles* of Christ (2:6).
 - i. This honor might refer to demanding payment for their work.
 - ii. In either case, Paul describes at least one other in his group as an *apostle* (Silas).
 - 1) This apparently refers to ones who served as *witnesses* of the resurrected Christ.
 - 2) Though having some authority, as mentioned here, they were not of the twelve.
 - 3) This may be Paul’s usage as he describes those who saw the risen lord (1 Cor. 15:3-9) and Luke’s usage in describing Barnabas as an apostle (Acts 14:14).
 - b. Instead of using their authority to make demands, they were *gentle* (most manu. have *infants*), nourishing them with love and concern as a mother would her child (2:7).
 - i. No better figure could represent their love and concern for these brethren.
 - ii. And, if such claims would mean nothing if not true.
 3. Their affection for these brethren caused Paul’s company not only to share with them the gospel, but also their very selves (2:8).
 - a. They gladly gave them their hearts and lives, not to mention being willing to suffer persecution on their behalf.
 - b. No wonder the Thessalonians responded so favorably to the gospel, seeing Paul’s company’s souls went out to their souls in bringing them the gospel!
 - c. NOTE: You must judge me, your teachers, and one another concerning whether we truly care about souls, being willing to commit our time and energy to helping you and others reach heaven through Christ?
- D. 4th: **For**, as proclaimers of Christ among them, the Thessalonians knew that their lifestyle was *worthy of God’s calling*, being full of great care and devotion to their salvation (2:9-12).
1. They saw their love in their laboring and toiling (i.e., exertion, hardship, and possibly pain) to support themselves so they did not have to seek it from the Thessalonians (2:9).
 - a. They worked night and day, whether in labors or preaching, to assure the gospel was preached to these brethren.

- b. Although Paul argued for the right to be supported by the gospel (1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18), and was supported by churches to preach in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8) and here (Phil. 4:16), from the Thessalonians they asked no wages.
 - c. Paul likely did this for the same reason he did at Corinth, to not hinder the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 9:12), seeing some might say they were greedy and doing it for gain.
 - d. And, refusal to do so set them apart from the philosophers, charlatans, etc., of that day, and provided the *example* for the Thessalonians to support themselves (2 Thess. 3:7-9).
 - e. NOTE: So, if I only work 3-4 hours a week, as some *regularly* suggest, then I am not worth my salt and need to be *rebuked* and *fired*!
2. Paul appeals to the Thessalonians as *witnesses*, along with God, of their conduct among them (2:10-12).
- a. They had witnessed their devout, righteous, and blameless behavior (2:10).
 - i. Devout – to live in a holy fashion, dedicated to God.
 - ii. Just – to live in accordance with *God’s* law, to do what is right.
 - iii. Blameless – to find no fault in them by which to blame
 - b. And, they had approached their work as a **father** would toward his children (2:11).
 - i. Note how Paul included the full parental relationship to describe their love and care!
 - ii. Exhorted – to plead with or admonish to follow God’s will (despite opposition)
 - iii. Comforted – 1) encourage; 2) consolation (as they faced persecution and difficulty)
 - iv. Charged/implored – to speak with forceful language (plainly/authoritatively) to bring these new converts to a mature faith—one that would hold up amid persecution.
 - v. These are all traits that show the love of a father in disciplining his children!
 - c. Their work was do so that they would “walk worthy of God” (2:12).
 - i. “Worthy of God” is indicative of one offering *the very best he has* to God, showing Christians are to live according to the highest of standard—*God’s* standard!
 - ii. This was importance because God calls us (pres. tense) into His *kingdom* and *glory*!
 - 1) As disciples of Christ we have been called to be *citizens* of Christ’s kingdom here on earth, while also being *continually called* to live worthy of this calling to be ready to enter God’s eternal kingdom and glory in heaven.
 - 2) We enter the kingdom at salvation (Col. 1:13-14 – “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”).
 - 3) It is only through *diligence* in *obeying God’s call* to holiness/faithfulness that we can be assured of our final entrance into the eternal kingdom of heaven (2 Pet. 1:10-11 – “Therefore, brethren, be even more **diligent to make your call and election sure**, for **if you do these things** you will never stumble; ¹¹ for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”)!
3. NOTE: Again, you must judge your preacher, teachers, and yourselves by whether...
- a. We seek to live devout, just, blameless lives, ones that follows God’s will?
 - b. Your preacher/teachers approach their work in Christ with the care/love of a father toward his children, exhorting, comforting, and charging all for their eternal good?
 - c. Each of us is willing to walk, or live life, worthy of God, living lives that befit one who is called by God to enter his kingdom and glory?

II. Paul expresses their thankfulness for the Thessalonians’ genuine conversion (2:13-16):

- A. They were *continually thankful* because the Thessalonians had received their teaching as being *from God*, allowing it to work within them as evidenced by their behavior (2:13-14).
 - 1. For those who love God and souls, nothing brings greater joy than to see those who hear the word believing it for what it is and obeying it (2:13; 3 Jn. 4 – “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”).
 - a. Acceptance of the word preached as *God’s word* is vital to acceptable obedience.

- b. To see this one just needs to note how Paul described the Thessalonians reaction to the gospel: “you received...you heard...you welcomed...works in you.”
 - c. We must have enough faith/concern to compare the word preached to the biblical word to see if the message is from God; and if so to receive it and obey it!
2. They were thankful and confident of the Thessalonians’ conversion because they became imitators of the churches of God in Judea in *facing persecution with endurance* (2:14).
 - a. Like the Christians in Judea, the Thessalonians had now suffered at the hands of their fellow citizens and remained faithful, giving cause for their thankfulness and confidence.
 - b. Does it not at time concern us, especially knowing the ease of our lives, that “all who desire to live **godly** in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).
- B. This hostility of the Jews toward God’s word, His Christ, Christians, and the Gentiles is historically characteristic of the Jews (2:15-16).
1. It is first and foremost seen in their killing of the Lord Jesus, second in killing the prophets, next in their persecution of Paul’s company, and finally in their opposition to all men (2:15).
 - a. Despite being God’s people by covenant, they did not please God, fighting against Him.
 - b. Jewish *opposition* to all things *Gentile* was documented as “terrible hatred” by Roman historians, although this was likely colored by their ungodly and idolatrous leanings.
 2. The Jews’ opposition to all Gentiles was at its worst in seeking to prevent their salvation in Christ (2:16).
 - a. God was aware of this sin, which was heaping/building up before Him to the point of God’s wrath coming down on them.
 - b. Their rejection of Christ had resulted in their immediate loss of salvation—loss of being God’s people—and would lead to the destruction of their nation in 70 A.D.
 - c. So, we all should **judge ourselves** as to whether we are willing to receive and obey God’s word, no matter the opposition or consequences.
 - d. The rest of the chapter will be covered with chapter 3 with which it more closely fits.

CONCLUSION:

1. I hope we learn from this how important our behavior in Christ truly is, whether it is as a preacher or teacher of the gospel, or as a member of God’s church and kingdom seeking eternal glory.
2. Purity, honesty, holiness, spirituality, and a desire to receive Gods’ word and obey it and tell it to others that we may have God’s eternal glory in heaven forever are all necessary qualities of a saved, faithful Christian.
3. And, they are qualities I am sure we all need to work on!
4. So, what will you do with Jesus and his call through the gospel to salvation, to dedication and devotion to Him, to eternal glory in heaven?
5. Will you accept the gospel of Christ by F-R-C-BP for the forgiveness of your sins that you might be raised from baptism with the hope of eternal life?