

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

¹For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ²But 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 impunity 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. ⁷But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. ⁹For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹²we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

In the opening of 1 Thessalonians Chapter 2, the apostle Paul shifts his discussion from thanksgiving to God and affirmation towards the Thessalonians to a seemingly sudden defense of his character. Paul chooses not to inform us on the specifics of the attack or from whom they originated. Therefore, we are simply left to make assumptions using our background information from Acts 17. Could it be that the same opponents to Paul at the onset of the church in Thessalonica were the source? In an effort to confuse new converts, could they have taken advantage of his quick departure and made slanderous claims? Perhaps it is best for us to focus primarily on what Paul does say. John R. W. Stott in his commentary on Thessalonians, states that by studying Paul's defense we can possibly reconstruct the slanders of the opponents.

*'He ran away', they sneered, 'and hasn't been seen or heard of since. Obviously he's insincere, impelled by the basest motives. He's just one more of those many phoney teachers who tramp up and down the Egnatian Way. In a word, he's a charlatan. He's in his job for what he can get out of it in terms of sex, money, prestige, or power. So when opposition arose, and he found himself in personal danger, he took to his heels and ran! He doesn't care about you Thessalonian disciples of his; he has abandoned you! He's much more concerned about his own skin than your welfare.'*¹

¹ Stott, John R. W. The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time. Edited by Motyer, J.A. (OT)

Stott also makes a powerful suggestion that Paul's determination to reply to the charges being leveled at him did not stem from a feeling of wounding or vanity, but *because the truth of the gospel and the future of the church were at stake.*²

There's nothing like a wounding that unleashes an unbridled tongue. Toss in erroneous accusations and the temptation to be dominated by impulsivity is overpowering. **Paul imitates for us, just as he did the Thessalonians, an unclouded indicator for when to speak up for our own defense:**

When the truth of the gospel and the future of the church are at stake.

When it's LESS about us, and MORE about Christ, THAT is when we are called to unleash those vocal cords in a song that points Heavenward. Where wounding and offense have caused us deep pain, may we welcome in the Healer. Where harsh and false accusations have beaten us to a pulp, may the voice of our critics and oppressors be drowned out by the voice of our Defender.

When they cry to the Lord because of oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and deliver them (Isaiah 19:20b).

Paul's Defense

Paul presents several character traits to prove that his apostleship and ministry were genuine. In his claim, Paul states that (1) his ministry was not empty in gain, (2) he proclaimed the gospel truth with boldness, despite great affliction, (3) that his message did not spring from error or an attempt to deceive, (4) he had been entrusted by God with the gospel and his aim was to please the Father, (5) he was gentle among them, willing to give of himself for their benefit, and finally, (6) rather than making demands on the people he worked so as to not be a burden to them.

We would certainly be remiss if we failed to apply this portion of Scripture to our pastors, teachers, and church leadership, but so deeply packed into this portion of Scripture is a model for Christian character that extends wide to the daily life of a believer as well.

Paul points out to the Thessalonian believers that they themselves knew that his coming to them was not a failure. There had been visible fruit in the lives of the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:2-10) from his missionary efforts there. In regards to these ridiculous attacks, the Thessalonians should consider that Paul still marched on boldly to proclaim the gospel in Thessalonica despite the suffering he had just endured while in Philippi. Paul and Silas had been previously beaten and jailed. Why on earth would they have continued on in their pursuit of spreading the gospel message unless they earnestly believed in the saving Name of Jesus?

² Ibid.

Their boldness was in God – not in themselves. Paul knew his confidence and his competence came from God alone (2 Corinthians 3:4-5). The miraculous demonstrations they encountered and faithfulness of God kept these brothers vigorously on the move. In *our witness*, maintaining boldness won't happen if we aren't willing to recount constantly the times we've seen the hand of God in our own lives while we rest in knowing it is in Him that we find our capability and strength.

*Behind the denials of vv. 3-4 is the assumption that some teachers brought to these Hellenistic cities “appeals” that were human in origin and motivation. Paul’s motives were not personal enrichment; his messages were not tailored for mass appeal. The message he proclaimed was divine truth, not human invention. Paul’s message was not of error, impurity, or deceit.*³ In contrast with the claim of having any kind of impure motives, Paul declared he worked to please God and not man. It was God who judged the motives of his heart. What would happen in our congregations if our hearts were consumed with pleasing the Lord rather than man? What if we were able to honestly testify, like Paul, that we had decided to know nothing amongst others but Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2)?

Far from having any kind of human origin, it was Jesus who revealed Himself to Paul on that Damascus road and entrusted him with the gospel message (Acts 9). Paul was an ambassador of Christ whom God made His appeal through to implore others to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20). Just as the Thessalonians sought to imitate Paul, so should we (1 Thess 1:6; 1 Cor 11:1).

The same Jesus Who entrusted Paul, has entrusted us.

Jesus, in the gospel of Matthew, describes faithfulness in the Kingdom of God through the Parable of the Talents.

For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property...each according to his ability...Then he went away.
Matthew 25:14-15.

In this parable we see Jesus teaching us that what has been entrusted to us - specifically, the gospel - is not meant to remain dormant, it's meant to multiply.

What are we doing with what has been entrusted to us?

³ Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New American Commentary.

As if Paul's defenses up to this point were not enough, he adds how affectionate he was towards the Thessalonians. The NIV translation puts it clearly,

*Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well*⁴

How is a lost world going to truly encounter the love of Christ and the message of salvation if we don't share our lives with them? Are we going to toss out a gospel tract or construct an Evangecube and call it a day or will we actually labor to give more of ourselves to people? Those things certainly have their time and place, but there's nothing like a city on a hill with her light on welcoming the world to come on in. The One we seek to point others to, He dwelled. *The Word became flesh and **dwelt** among us.*⁵ It's in the dwelling, the daily living and breathing, that an extraordinary glimpse of Christ could be made evident in the lives of those around us. *Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).*

Instead of being a burden to the Thessalonians, Paul chose to work while he witnessed there. *This modeled for the church an unmistakable spirit of industry and self reliance, a spirit diametrically opposed to the charlatans who sold religion in the marketplace, as well as at odds with the idle who lived off of the generosity of others (1 Thess 5:14, 2 Thess 3:6-15).*⁶ Paul's willingness to toil night and day expressed a humble, sincere love for the people.

In addition to all of these things, Paul claimed to be gentle towards the Thessalonians. He compared his actions to that of a mother and a father. A mother's love cannot be measured. There is no distance a mother would not go for her child. Her care for her children demands both dedication and sacrifice. These qualities flowed out from Paul, as did those of a father. *Paul seems to be thinking specially of the educational role of fathers, who, in addition to setting their children example, should also encourage, comfort and exhort them. What is impressive is that, in his pastoral care of the Thessalonians, Paul could claim to have combined both the father's and the mother's roles.*⁷

Paul's fatherly charge for the Thessalonians was to walk in a manner worthy of God. Under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, will we be charged by Paul's words from The Father to do the same?

⁴ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (1 Th 2:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 1:14). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁶ Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New American Commentary.

⁷ Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time*. Edited by Motyer, J.A. (OT) and Stott, John R.W. (NT), 1991. Inter-Varsity Press. The Bible Speaks Today Series.