

Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians (6) Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

Introduction:

For 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 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. 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. (1 Thess. 2:1-12, ESV)

The apostle had just stated at least six reasons that had convinced him that these Christians in the church of Thessalonica were numbered among the elect of God (1:5-10). Paul was certain that God had chosen them from eternity to receive salvation from sin through His Son, Jesus Christ. Beginning with 2:1, Paul then recounted his efforts and behavior when he had first come among them preaching the gospel. It appears that the apostle did so in order to refute charges that someone (or some people) who had made against him and his ministry among them. There had been some who had sought to discredit his ministry, perhaps in order to dissuade them from their commitment to the gospel. By reciting the nature of his ministry among them, not only was he refuting the false charges against him, but Paul was also setting forth himself as an example for Christians to emulate. This understanding of the context of Paul's words is that of the editors of **The New Reformation Study Bible**, which reads,

Paul seems to respond to certain doubts or criticisms of his ministry. He implicitly defends his ministry of the gospel, and at the same time, by recalling the work he and his companions have done, he gives the Thessalonians a pattern of loving service to follow.¹

Let us begin to work through this passage by first recognizing that...

I. Paul was confident of their salvation (2:1)

Paul first made a statement in which the apostle appealed to their knowledge of the positive result of his ministry among them. He wrote, "**For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain**" (2:1). Paul's ministry among these people was not "empty" of substance or effect.² Paul regarded

¹ R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., *The Reformation Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson Pub., 1995), p. 1895.

² The Greek word, κενὴ , can be translated as "vain" or "empty."

his ministry among them as having been greatly blessed of the Lord. The word that he had brought to them had been transformative, having brought them to experience new life in Jesus Christ.

Paul was not always as confident that his ministry had not been in vain. He stood in doubt of some who had claimed to believe. The Scriptures actually set forth three ways in which one might “believe” in vain. In other words, these people may claim to believe, but they do not have true salvation. We have spoken of this before. God does not bestow His salvation upon heretics, apostates, or hypocrites. All three of these professed to be believers, to have “faith”, but their faith was not saving faith.

A. The heretic, the “believer” who has abandoned the essential truth of the gospel, will not inherit salvation.

Paul was concerned about the salvation of those who lived in Galatia. They had lapsed into legalism through the influence of false teachers. This moved Paul to write to them, “I am afraid for you, *lest I have labored for you in vain*” (Gal 4:11). If they abandoned the true gospel of Jesus Christ for another gospel, Paul would have regarded his ministry among them as having no lasting effect--it would have been in vain--they were lost after all.

Paul had argued with them that if they forsook the doctrine of justification by God’s grace through faith alone, they would not have salvation. He wrote later in his epistle, “Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing” (Gal. 5:2). Paul was in doubt of them, for they were in danger of embracing *heresy*, doctrine contrary to the gospel. He wrote, “I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you” (Gal. 4:20). But Paul had no doubts about those in the church at Thessalonica, for his ministry of the word among them had been very fruitful. And he knew that they knew this to be true, so he could write, “*For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.*”

B. The hypocrite, the “believer” whose life does not reflect the life of a true Christian, will not inherit salvation.

The apostle had also written the Corinthians about the danger of having believed *in vain*. In 1 Corinthians 15 we read Paul’s words,

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--*unless you believed in vain.* (1 Cor. 15:1, 2)

Here we see that some might “believe” the gospel and yet not be saved by the gospel, for they “believed in vain.” What is the apostle speaking about here? It is very likely that he was warning these professing Christians against the damning result of *hypocrisy*. *What is hypocrisy?* It is pretending what we are not. It is to pretend, as one once put it, that we “*have degrees of excellence, of which we are destitute; to have respect or affection, when we have it not, or to have it in a degree far beyond what we feel. As the opposite of malice is love, and of deceit uprightness; so the opposite of hypocrisy is sincerity*” (John Brown). The apostle had been very concerned about the manner in which the professing Christians had been living. Paul’s epistle of 1 Corinthians contained Paul’s repeated rebuke of their sin. And in his second epistle, he forthrightly told them that they needed to assess themselves honestly as to their salvation. He wrote to them,

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you fail to meet the test! (2 Cor. 13:5)

Now God has revealed in His word that he will not save from sin the one who lives in hypocrisy, the one who may be classified as a hypocrite. *What is a hypocrite?* A hypocrite is someone who claims to be righteous, but whose speech or behavior testifies otherwise. Now every one of us, I suspect, have

manifested some measure of hypocrisy in the manner in which we speak or live. But where we may struggle with the sin or problem of hypocrisy, it may not rise to the level that we may be labeled, “hypocrites.”

Our Lord warned His disciples of the hypocrisy that characterized the Pharisees: Luke 12:1 records, “He began to say to His disciples first of all, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.’” Indeed, our Lord confronted the Pharisees directly as hypocrites--they did not have salvation. He said to them,

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but *inside you are full of hypocrisy* and lawlessness.” (Matt. 23:27f)

Our Lord’s pronouncement of “woe” upon them was a declaration of God’s condemnation of them--God’s wrath was coming upon them.

There are “believers” who prove to be hypocrites, ones who are without salvation even while they claim to be believers. Sometimes their true condition is revealed suddenly, when it is very apparent by their attitude or actions, but with some their condition is known only after some time. An example of the first may be in the case of **Simon Magus**. We read of him in Acts 8.

⁹But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, ¹⁰to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” ¹¹And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. ¹²But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. ¹³Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

¹⁴Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, ¹⁵who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, “Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

²⁰But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! ²¹You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. ²²Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.” (Acts 8:9-23)

Peter recognized that Simon was no Christian, for his attitude, his values, and his words, betrayed his true condition. Simon was a hypocrite; he was no true Christian.

But a hypocrite can become known only after the passing of time. This is a “believer” who may at one time been quite “devout” and committed, but gave himself over to the cares of the world, or for the accumulation of riches or pleasure, until his condition becomes apparent, but with some it will not become known until the day of judgment. Our Lord warned of this kind of hypocrite, in which he set forth his case in the parable of the sower. He said,

“Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they

immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. ⁷And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. ⁸But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matt. 13:3-9)

Later our Lord explained the parable to His disciples. Regarding the seed that had fallen among thorns, he said, "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and ***the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful***" (Matt. 13:22). This person is also a hypocrite. His case is not immediately apparent as was that of Simon Magus. But it was just as damning. The cares of the world or the cares for riches slowly engulfed him and slowly choked the spiritual life that had once seemed to be present. He was as those whom Paul had written,

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame-- who set their mind on earthly things. (Phi. 3:18f)³

Do any of us have trouble with this matter of hypocrisy? Probably, but we are to address it and correct it, with the Lord's help. Peter wrote these words:

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, ²³having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, ²⁴because

"All flesh is as grass,
And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
The grass withers,
And its flower falls away,
²⁵But the word of the LORD endures forever."

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

^{2:1}Therefore, ***laying aside all*** malice, all deceit, ***hypocrisy***, envy, and all evil speaking, ² as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (1 Pet. 1:22-2:3)

Here we read of those who had "purified" their "souls in obeying the truth" (1 Pet. 1:22), who had been "born again", or regenerated through the Word of God (1:23), nevertheless, they had to be actively "laying aside all... hypocrisy." I suspect that most of us must lay aside hypocrisy from time to time, but our problem with this sin does not rise to the level of characterizing us as hypocrites. A hypocrite does not have salvation, although he may claim to be a true believer in Jesus Christ. But a true believer may struggle with the sin of hypocrisy, from which he is to repent, and will repent, by the grace of God.

Our Lord warned His disciples about this matter:

"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. ⁴⁵Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? ⁴⁶Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. ⁴⁷Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' ⁴⁹and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and

³ There is difference of opinion as to who these persons were, but one possibility, which is reflected here, was that they were professing Christians who had refused to live a life in which they denied themselves--living according to the cross of Christ. Instead, of Christ being their god, their god is their own belly, their own lusts, "who set their mind on earthly things."

drink with the drunkards,⁵⁰the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of,⁵¹and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion *with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” (Matt. 24:44-51)

C. The apostate, the “believer” who only believed for a while, but then abandoned his faith in Christ.

Now when Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica that his coming among them was not in vain, it is very likely that he was speaking of their continuance or perseverance of their faith in the face of opposition. You may recall when we began our study of this epistle, we read of Luke’s account of Paul Silas (Silvanus), and Timothy having brought the gospel to this city. But after a few Sabbath days of ministry, having begun the church, Paul and his ministry team had to leave the area because of the persecution against them that arose against them. Here is the account once again of Paul preaching the gospel among them:

²Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” ⁴And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

⁵But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. ⁶But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. ⁷Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.” ⁸And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. ⁹So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. (Acts 17:2-9)

Now because Paul had to leave abruptly, and having done so very soon after they had “believed” the gospel, Paul was not absolutely confident that his proclamation of the gospel in Thessalonica had not been in vain. Therefore, soon afterward, when Paul was in Athens (or perhaps Corinth), Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on them. He brought back a good report, telling Paul that these new Christians were continuing in the faith. This is what we read in 1 Thessalonians 3.

Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, ²and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, ³that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. ⁴For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. ⁵For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. ⁶But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you-- ⁷therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. (1 Thess. 3:1-7)

And so, when Paul wrote in 2:1, “For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain”, I believe he was referring to their continuance or perseverance in their faith even in the face of persecution. They were not apostates, who had only believed for a while, but then abandoned Christ. They were not as those “stony ground” hearers of the Word that our Lord spoke of Matthew 13:5 and 6:

“Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.” (Matt. 13:5, 6)

Our Lord later explained to His disciples what kind of “believer” this stony ground hearer represented:

“But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.” (Matt. 13:20f)

Paul knew these Christians had become genuine Christians. He could say with confidence, and they knew perfectly well themselves, that his initially coming among them to preach the gospel had not been in vain. And so, we see that the Paul was confident of their salvation. Next, we read that

II. Paul was confident in the gospel that had brought them to salvation (2:2)

We read in **verse 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.”* Paul had declared the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. We read earlier about this conflict. Luke described the scene:

But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. (Acts17:5)

But even in this conflict, Paul was not deterred, for Paul had declared the gospel “in the midst of much conflict.”

Now, what was the reason that Paul set forth this statement? Again, he was attempting to dismiss any false charge that he had been unfaithful to his message or that he had been unduly fearful of his hearers. He was in effect saying:

“Our mission (whatever that of others may be) is not the outcome of self-seeking, otherwise, it would readily be checked by such outward circumstances. Our confidence is in God, not in ourselves; our work is not self-appointed but a sacred trust or commission, for which we are responsible to Him.”⁴

He was reasoning therefore, that

Discouragement and hesitation are impossible. Paul argues the very fact of the cheerful perseverance at Thessalonica, after their bad treatment at Philippi, points to the divine source and strength of their mission; what impelled them was simply a sense of lasting responsibility to God, upon the one hand, and an overpowering devotion to men upon the other, for the gospel’s sake. Had the apostle yielded to feelings of irritation and despondency, giving up their task in Macedonian, after the troubles in Philippi, or had they conducted themselves at Thessalonica in such a way as to secure ease and profit; in either case, they would have proved their mission to be ambitious or selfish, and therefore undivine. As it was, their courage and sincerity were at once evidence and the outcome of their divine mission.⁵

Now some believe that the blessing of God through His gospel takes place when there is little or no conflict, that the gospel, if blessed of the Lord, will be received with little difficulty and immediate. Some go so far that they will trim the content of the message in order to make it more palatable to sinners, that they might receive it with little difficulty and little demand upon them. But that is not how the gospel went

⁴ James Moffet, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. By W. Robertson Nicoll (William B. Eerdmans, 1951), p. 26.

⁵ Ibid.

forth in the apostolic world. The gospel was declared in much conflict because the gospel itself caused conflict when it engaged and confronted the lost in the world. We read **Charles Spurgeon's** words recently about this. Again, he wrote,

A gospel which is after men will be welcomed by men; but it needs divine operation upon the heart and mind to make a man willing to receive into his inmost soul this distasteful gospel of the grace of God. My dear brethren, do not try to make it tasteful to carnal minds. Hide not the offense of the cross, lest you make it of none effect. The angles and corners of the gospel are its strength and to pare them off is to deprive it of power. Toning down is not the increase of strength, but the death of it.

The gospel was the cause of conflict because it engaged and confronted a fallen world with its sin and its condemnation due to that sin.

This was certainly true of the public ministry of the Lord Jesus. Basically, Paul was saying that his ministry of the word was much like that of our Savior. The Lord Jesus proclaimed God's word in much conflict. Yes, there was great surprise and many at times received His word with gladness. But more often than not, when our Lord preached the Word of God, it resulted in confrontation, conflict, and opposition, sometimes violent opposition to Himself.⁶

But Paul was confident in this gospel, and so he proclaimed it openly and widely even in the midst of much conflict. Paul was confident that God had appointed the gospel to be the manner in which His power is put forth in saving people from their sins. And so, Paul could write to the church at Rome, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom 1:16). In 1 Corinthians 4:15 Paul wrote, "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus *I have begotten you through the gospel.*" God brings forth spiritual life by and through His Word of the gospel.

Paul set forth to the church at Thessalonica in his second epistle the power of God through the gospel to bring them to salvation:

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴*to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (2 Thess. 2:13f)

Here, in verse 2, Paul used the phrase, "the gospel of God." This phrase is used 7 times in Scripture, three of those in our passage. Here they are:

1 Thessalonians 2:2. "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."

1 Thessalonians 2:8. "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."

1 Thessalonians 2:9. "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.*"

This phrase describes the source of the Gospel, or the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is God's good news to us; it is the gospel of God.

The essential content of the gospel is the good news announced by God that although all mankind is under His condemnation for sin, nevertheless, due to God's great love for His fallen world, He has provided a means of salvation for sinners. Although mankind has rejected God's rightful rule over them

⁶ Example: the reaction of the people to him in his hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:16ff).

and have incurred His everlasting wrath in His punishment of their sin, He has, nevertheless, established an everlasting kingdom into which He will bring all of His redeemed, that they may dwell with Him in eternity. God has ordained His Son, Jesus of Nazareth, to be the Prophet who would instruct them, the only Priest who would atone for their sin, and the Promised King who alone could and would save them by His power. God is able to grant salvation through the merit and power of our Lord's life, death, and resurrection, and His current reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus Christ is able to save any and all sinners who come to Him and submit to Him as their Lord and Savior. God uses this gospel to call His elect into the state of their salvation, which God had promised and provided in eternity.

Because Paul was confident that the power of God would be manifest in the gospel, he was therefore very bold to proclaim that gospel.

III. Paul was committed to His God to proclaim the gospel faithfully. (2:3ff)

We read in **verse 3**, *“For 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.*

Paul declared that God had entrusted him with the gospel. This was truly a sacred trust that God handed to the apostle. Paul felt compelled before God to proclaim the gospel fully and accurately. He suggests that he was accountable to God, that he would one day stand before his God and there be assessed as to his faithfulness to the gospel. His great aim and desire was to please God by proclaiming the gospel of God faithfully. And in pleasing God, he would not be concerned chiefly with pleasing man.

What is meant by *pleasing men* has been explained in the Epistle to the Galatians, (Galatians 1:10) and this passage, also, shews it admirably. For Paul contrasts *pleasing men*, and *pleasing God*, as things that are opposed to each other. Farther, when he says — *God, who trieth our hearts*, he intimates, that those who endeavor to obtain the favor of men, are not influenced by an upright conscience, and do nothing from the heart. Let us know, therefore, that true ministers of the gospel ought to make it their aim to devote to God their endeavors, and to do it from the heart, not from any outward regard to the world, but because conscience tells them that it is right and proper. Thus it will be secured that they will not make it their aim to *please men*, that is, that they will not act under the influence of ambition, with a view to the favor of men.⁷

Paul could argue, *“For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness”* (v. 5). Perhaps some of Paul's detractors had made the charge that he was selfishly motivated, seeking to build a following for himself. But Paul could show that there was no evidence that he had attempted to enrich himself or promote himself when he proclaimed the gospel among them.

Paul could also not be justly charged with seeking to further his own name, to gain personal recognition or influence. He wrote in **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.”* It would have been possible for Paul to ingratiate himself through his apostolic office and gifts, but he refused to do so.

Paul could say, rather, *“But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children”* (v. 7). Paul drew upon the most tender image imaginable, that of a mother nursing her baby. Paul felt that this best described his attitude and his concern toward these people. As a nursing mother loves her baby, Paul loved these people. He bore them no ill will. He did not disregard them because he was only concerned about promoting his own name. He was concerned for them, as the next verse expresses:

⁷ Calvin, John, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21 (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 250.

So, 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. (2:8)

He next appealed to the first-hand knowledge of these Christians. In **verse 9** we read,

For 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.

Paul did not receive money from these people. He worked independently, both night and day, so that they would not need to support him in his ministry. He lived before them in a blameless manner. No one could justly say differently. **Verse 10** reads,

You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.

And then lastly, the apostle likened himself to a loving father with his children, who taught them, trained them, and challenged them “to walk in a manner worthy of God.” **Verse 11** reads,

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. (2:11)

Paul was bold in that he knew his gospel was from God. He was persuasive for he knew that this gospel would bring blessing to those who believe. Paul was faithful, for he knew he was responsible for God for the manner he represented and presented that word to the world.

It is the function of the herald simply to pass on the words given to him. His is not to give a message of his own devising, not even to elaborate what has been given to him. He simply passes on what he is told. So Paul thinks of the preacher as one who passes on “the gospel of God.” This conviction that the message comes from God is fundamental to effective preaching. And the message must indeed be that which comes from God. Little moral essays will never take its place. It is easy to distort the message or to substitute something else for it. But what gives Christianity its power is the fact that the gospel is “of God.” Any trifling with this is bound to result in loss of power.⁸

Conclusion:

We may draw several conclusions from our passage.

1. Let us be true to the Word of God in all of our proclamation. This will bring great comfort and encouragement in our ministry of the Word of God.
2. Let us not fear those to whom we bring our message of the gospel, even though we suspect it might result in great conflict. May those who oppose us at least be able to say of us as they said to our Lord: “Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men” (Mat 22:16). May we be able to say of ourselves, what Paul said of himself: “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Gal 1:10).

⁸ Morris, Leon, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (William B. Eerdmans, 1959), p. 82.

3. Let us recognize our responsibility as a church and as individuals that we are accountable to our Lord for how we represent Him before others. He has committed the gospel to us as a “trust.” We are duty bound to proclaim it fully and rightly.
4. May we recognize the evidence of a true work of God as we proclaim His Word. We can expect conflict. No, we do not intentionally stir it up. But if we are faithful to engage a fallen world with the Word of God, it will inevitably result in conflict sometime, somewhere, with some people.
5. May the Lord grant us genuine compassion for the lost about us. May we view people in the light of eternity! We should be willing to proclaim the gospel faithfully and frequently, even though we know that it may result in conflict, because we are genuinely concerned for their good. If we truly love people, we will speak to them over their objections.
6. Similarly, let us desire and work for the greatest good of every one about us as we impart the gospel to them. This is how the apostle viewed people and his “ministry” toward them.

The apostle had a most affectionate love to their persons, and sought them, not theirs; themselves, not their goods; and to gain them, not to be a gainer by them, or to make merchandise of them; it was their spiritual and eternal welfare and salvation that he was earnestly desirous of.⁹

And so, in all of our witness, may we exhibit a genuine tenderness to others, conveying our desire for their well-being. Of Paul, one said,

He mentions the gentleness of their behavior: *We were gentle among you*, v. 7. He showed great mildness and tenderness who might have acted with the authority of an apostle of Christ. Such a behavior greatly recommends religion, and is most agreeable to God’s gracious dealing with sinners, in and by the gospel. This great apostle, though he abhorred and avoided flattery, was most condescending to all men (in a good sense). He accommodated himself to all men’s capacities, *and became all things to all men*. He showed the kindness and care of a nurse that cherishes her children. This is the way to win people, rather than rule with rigour. The Word of God is indeed powerful; and as it comes often with awful authority upon the minds of men, as it always has enough in it to convince every impartial judgment, so it comes with the more pleasing power when the ministers of the gospel recommend themselves to the affections of the people. And as a nursing mother bears with the forwardness in a child, and condescends to mean (simple) offices for its good, and draws out of her breast, cherishing it in her bosom, so in like manner should ministers of Christ behave toward their people. *The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, and be patient* (2 Timothy 2:24).¹⁰

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus,
 after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.
 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 5:10f)

⁹ Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6 (Fleming H. Revell), pp.776.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 775f.