



1 Thessalonians

Christian Conduct & The Lord's Return

1 Thessalonians 2:9–16

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Introduction

Chapter 2 is all about biblical ministry. Paul had a brief but fruitful ministry among the Thessalonians, and yet some were questioning the integrity of his actions. In verses 1–8, Paul defended his ministry and conduct by demonstrating that his motive was to please God. The evidence of that motive was his desire to serve the Thessalonians.

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica (2:1–16)

Recall that Paul is defending his ministry among the Thessalonians by calling upon them as eyewitnesses. They were able to corroborate his account because of their first-hand interaction with him.

A Description of Paul's Ministry and Conduct (2:1–12)

The previous study looked at Paul's motives in ministry. This study will examine additional characteristics of his conduct, giving us a model for biblical ministry.

Additional Characteristics of Paul's Ministry (vv. 9–12)

Paul had previously claimed that his motive for ministry was to please God and serve others. In these verses, his conduct will serve as a confirmation of his motives. Notice what he did:

He was Self-Sacrificing (v. 9)

Paul labored night and day through much hardship so he could minister to the Thessalonians (cf. 2 Cor 11:27; 2 Thess 3:8). He put forth a great deal of manual labor in carrying out his ministry. His desire was to not be a financial burden to any of the Thessalonians. We do know that he was supported financially by the Philippians while ministering in Thessalonica (Phil 4:15–16). This helped removed any charge of being motivated by greed, and also removed this as an obstacle to his audience believing the gospel. But regardless of the Philippians' support, Paul still worked hard giving of himself sacrificially for the work

of the ministry. His diligence is a testament to all who would desire to labor in the Lord's vineyard.

The question arises: Is Paul's foregoing of financial support *descriptive* or *normative*? We saw in the previous study that Paul's choice not to receive financial support from the Thessalonians was voluntary and therefore *descriptive* of what happened. It was not *prescriptive* (normative) for how biblical ministries *must* operate today. It is only normative in the sense that a vocational minister can *voluntarily* forego support from his congregation if he so chooses (cf. Gal 6:6; 1 Cor 9:9–14; 1 Tim 5:17–18).

He was Upright (v. 10)

This verse addresses a ministry that is morally upright. Remember that Paul was ministering in a landscape that was full of religious charlatans. There were multiple competing interests vying for the hearts and affections of the people. But unlike all the others, Paul's was not a ministry built on greed, a lust for power, sexual immorality, or any other wicked thing. Paul lived a life that was holy, righteous, and blameless. It is possible that some unbelievers may have slandered Paul's conduct. However, Paul is not thinking about how he acted among unbelievers, but how he acted among believers. It was the believing Thessalonians among whom Paul ministered who could confirm his conduct. Of course, this does not excuse ministers of the gospel to be duplicitous and live moral lives only when other believers are around (1 Tim 3:7; cf. v. 2; Gal 6:10). Paul's entire Christian life exemplified godly conduct among both believers and unbelievers.

He was Faithful (vv. 11–12)

When Paul described his *care* for the Thessalonian believers, he used the metaphor of a nursing mother (v. 7). When describing his *teaching* of the Thessalonians, he uses the metaphor of a father teaching his children. Both of these metaphors are based on Paul's relationship with these believers.

Three descriptive terms clarify the simile of a father and his children and answer the question, "How did Paul treat these believers as a father?" The three descriptive terms used at the start of verse 12 unfold the nature of Paul's pastoral dealings with the Thessalonian believers. (Note: some versions will seem to reverse the order of verses 11 and 12. This is due to a variation in the word arrangement in the underlying

Greek texts.) The first, *exhorting* is general and indicates a strong appeal made to the converts to accept a suitable course of action. The second, *comforting* denotes the soothing and encouraging side of exhortation inspiring them to continue in the desired course of action. The third term, *imploring/urging* points to the solemnity and earnestness with which the appeal is made. All three terms refer to Paul's discipling of believers in apostolic doctrine.

They were being called upon to live lives "worthy of God." Since the standard is God Himself, we know that this is unattainable here in this life. However, just because we cannot attain it doesn't mean we shouldn't strive to reach it (cf. Matt 5:48; 1 Pet 4:14–16). The "calling" Paul speaks of here takes us back to the issue of divine election (see notes on 1:4). All true believers are called by God to their future inheritance and glory. Since that is true, we also ought to live lives worthy of God. Every Christian has been called as an heir of Christ's kingdom and will share in and reflect His glory!

The Validation of Paul's Ministry and Conduct (2:13–16)

The defense of Paul's ministry did not rest entirely on his shoulders. The response of the Thessalonians to Paul's ministry served to validate his ministry and its underlying conduct.

Their Response to Paul's Preaching (v. 13)

The Thessalonian believers received not only Paul's missionary team, but their instruction as well. The "word of God" which they received certainly included the gospel, but it was not limited to only that. It would have included all manner of doctrine and practical teachings — things which pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet 2:3). The Great Commission is far broader than merely preaching the gospel to make converts. It also includes instructing those converts to walk worthy of God (v. 12). But when they received Paul's instruction, they did not do so with skepticism or a lackadaisical attitude. They received it reverently as though God Himself were speaking to them. With this statement Paul is affirming their understanding of the source of his message — i.e. it was divinely authored.

This raises a theological issue on the subject of inspiration. Is inspiration a quality which only applies to the *product* (2 Tim 3:16 — the written text of Scripture), or does it also involve the *process* of receiving new revelation (2 Pet 1:21)? The Scriptures seem to indicate that inspiration

is *both* a process and a product (cf. 2 Thess 2:15). Paul's verbal apostolic teaching was equally as inspired as his apostolic writings. Paul's teachings had an ongoing effect in the lives of these believers. And it was for this reason that Paul was continually thankful to God. Those teachings can have the same effect today in our lives and be a source of much thanksgiving for those who minister the gospel!

Their Participation in the Sufferings of Believers (vv. 14–16)

The fact that the Thessalonians were willing to suffer for the gospel was proof of God's word working in them and is validation for Paul's ministry.

Their Suffering (v. 14)

The new Christian converts in Judea had suffered greatly at the hands of the Jews. Paul himself could testify to that since he used to be one of those persecuting believers (Acts 7:57 – 8:1; 1 Cor 15:9)! The true churches in Judea had suffered physical violence, economic hardship, and even displacement from their homes because of their stand for Christ. The Thessalonians were experiencing similar persecutions at the hands of their non-believing countrymen. Paul's point in mentioning this is that believers suffering persecution at the hands of unbelievers is a common experience and is evidence of the working of God's word.

Condemnation of Their Oppressors (vv. 15–16)

Paul now addresses those who are doing the persecuting. Notice four things about the condemnation of the Jews: 1) Scripture describes Israel as a nation responsible, in part at least, for the death of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus (Acts 2:23; 7:52). Paul makes the point that the Jewish nation continues in the same pattern of unbelief and persecution of believers just as their ancestors did; 2) The Jews had severely persecuted Paul and his companions (2 Cor 11:24); 3) The Jews had displeased God; and 4) They are opposed to all mankind in the sense that they oppose the work of God through the gospel. Paul was speaking to the Gentiles so that they might be saved (v. 16). The end of verse 16 has been used by Jews even today to charge Paul with anti-Semitism. But that charge must also be weighed in light of his love and concern for the Jews (cf. Rom 9–11). But in the present age, hardness of heart has been the Jews' portion and will result in God's wrath upon all who die in unbelief. The full measure of their sins will not be filled until after the time of Jacob's trouble (the tribulation) at Christ's Second Coming. Nevertheless, pray that God would save some! ~AWB