

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 2:1-8** . . . For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, [2] but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. [3] For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; [4] but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. [5] For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— [6] nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. [7] But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. [8] Having so fond an affection 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 very dear to us.

B. Pray

II. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-4

A. [1] For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in **vain** . . .

1. The evangelistic, the teaching, and the individual discipleship work Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy had done among the Thessalonians was productive and fruitful – for it resulted in their conversion in the midst of persecution and in a growing and measurable transformation from sinful idol worshipers to godly Christians.
2. Paul's statement here in **vs 1** infers that both he and the Thessalonian believers were able to see the life changes that were coming about from his ministry among them. This is verified in:
 - a. **1:3** – where Paul speaks of their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - b. **1:6** – where Paul says they became imitators of Paul, Silvanus, Timothy, and the Lord, and were living accordingly.
 - c. **1:8-9** – where Paul acknowledges that they had turned from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for Jesus' return.

- d. Once again, these are changes both Paul and the believers could see, measure, and clearly describe.
 3. Are you aware of, and can you clearly describe, spiritual and life-transforming changes in your thinking, values, beliefs, desires, speaking, and daily behavior over the past two or three years? Are these changes significant enough to be noticed by me and others – especially those nearest and dearest to you?
 4. Is the teaching and discipling work God has given me to do among you productive and fruitful?
 5. We are Christians who together make up a family of believers, and as such two things ought to be happening related to what we are talking about right now.
 - a. **First**, we ought to be experiencing continued growth in Christ-likeness – growth that we can measure and describe, and growth that is able to be seen by those around us.
 - b. **Second**, we ought to be praying for and helping each other grow so that our thoughts, desires, values, beliefs, words, and deeds are continuing to become more and more Christ-like, and therefore pleasing to God and beneficial to those around us.
- B. [2a] but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know . . .
1. As you may already know, Paul and Silas (*Silvanus*) were stripped of their outer garments, beaten with rods, and put in prison with their feet locked in stocks – for preaching the gospel and casting a demon out of a girl. That night, while they were singing hymns and praying in their jail cell, an earthquake shook the building so hard that the cell doors opened and the chains fell off the prisoners (**Acts 16:14-40**).
 2. Though Paul points out that the Thessalonian believers knew about their brutal treatment in Philippi, his main point in bringing the past suffering up is to show that neither previous persecution nor present persecution they was going to deter them from doing the work God sent them to do.
- C. And so Paul goes on to say [2b], we had the **boldness in our God** to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition . . .
1. This word “boldness” includes the idea of courage. In other words, Paul is saying they had courageous boldness in speaking the gospel to the Thessalonians. And having just come from being beaten with

rods and imprisoned with their feet in stocks, and currently facing open opposition to their efforts of evangelism and discipleship in Thessalonica – from both Jews and Gentiles – courageous boldness is what they needed.

2. Which raises the question, where did their courageous boldness come from? I think it is reasonable to say that Paul and Silvanus were neither timid nor fearfully cautious to begin with. They were men of action. Yet Paul states that their courageous boldness came from God, with the inference that it came as a result of their faith in God and their conviction that God sent them.
 - a. In other words, this kind of boldness was not natural to Paul. And he affirms this in his request for prayer in **Ephesians 6:19-20**, “And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with [courageous] boldness the mystery of the gospel, [20] for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”
 - b. Notice, that though Paul lacked this kind of natural boldness, it was not natural for him to look to God and count on God to give him the courageous boldness needed to preach the gospel in threatening settings.
 3. What threatening settings deter you from representing God to the people around you?
 - a. None of us here today need fear being beaten with rods or thrown in jail and chained in an uncomfortable position. But we do face the possibility of ridicule, criticism, loss of respect, discrimination, and rejection for openly talking about God.
 - b. Does embarrassment, ridicule, or rejection over being a witness for Christ and His word stop you from speaking up, or do you turn to God and ask Him for courageous boldness to speak as you ought?
 4. May we value God’s desire for more children, the sinner’s need for salvation, and the new believer’s need for spiritual growth more than we value our personal safety or the acceptance and approval of the world around us.
- D. [3] For our **exhortation** (*our encouragement, advice, and counsel to do what is good and commendable as new Christians*) does not come from **error** or **impurity** or by way of **deceit** . . .

1. Paul and Silvanus and Timothy's teaching was not from **error** – that is, it was not false or wrong or lacking reason. What they were teaching was true, accurate, and reasonable. To live according to their teaching would lead to life – now and for eternity. To live otherwise, would lead to death – in this world and the next.
 2. Next Paul says that their teaching did not come from **impurity** – that is, their teaching was not a mixture of truth and error, right and wrong, holy and unholy. Their teaching was pure truth and therefore fully trustworthy. The listener did not have to worry about which part to believe and which part to discard, or which part to put into practice and which part to avoid.
 3. And finally, their teaching did not come by way of **deceit**. In other words, they had no self-serving motives. They were not luring listeners into a religion or a church of their own making. And they weren't using appeals to the listeners' selfishness to get them to convert to Christianity. Their message was without deceitful cunning or self-interest.
 4. As Christians, our life not only belongs to God, it is to be lived for God out of love for God – and that includes whatever ministry or Christian service or evangelistic efforts we might get involved in.
 - a. Paul said it well in **2 Corinthians 5:14-15**, “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; [15] and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”
 - b. Our ministry efforts, whatever they may be, ought to be for God and those we serve – so that they are free of self-interest. (JW)
- E. [4] but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.
1. **but just as we have been approved by God** – What Paul is saying is that he, Silvanus, and Timothy have been tested by God and deemed fit for service. In other words, God deemed them worthy for the task He was giving them.
 - a. Interestingly, in writing to Timothy, Paul gives him a comprehensive explanation of what makes us fit and therefore worthy to be leaders and teachers in the church, or in an organization that represents God and the church. He also warns Timothy about things that make us unfit for such service.

- b. **2 Timothy 2:15-22**, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God (*or before God*) as a workman who (*has been tested and deemed fit, and therefore*) does not need to be ashamed (*for inaccurately handling or misrepresenting – in word or deed – the word of truth, but rather*), accurately handling the word of truth (*because handling God’s word accurately is essential for the hearer, the health of the church, and growth to maturity of the believer*). [16] But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to (*or encourage*) further ungodliness, [17] and [such] talk will spread like gangrene. Among [those who talk like this] are Hymenaeus and Philetus, [18] men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. [21] Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the things [that make him a vessel for dishonor], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. [22] Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”
- c. To become a tested and approved worker who accurately handles and properly represents God’s word – in word and deed – requires cleansing yourself from the things that make you a vessel for dishonor, for such things blind you to the truth and make for hypocrisy in your daily living.
- d. To make it a little easier to personally and practically apply the truths of **2 Timothy 2:15-22**, let’s focus on the word **flee**.
- (1) In **2 Timothy 2:22**, Paul says to **flee** from youthful lusts, that is, flee from the excessive and self-seeking desires of teenagers and young adults. I suspect it only takes a little imagination and contemplation to remember some of those desires and ways in yourself or the young people around you. Once you have recalled your past, you can examine your present life to see if any of those things still linger in you.
- (2) In **1 Corinthians 6:18**, Paul says to **flee** [sexual] immorality. This is so straight forward it needs no further explanation. However, it does need some honest self-examination from all of us, and especially among those who

lead and teach, because parts of sexual immorality appear to be alive and even thriving in churches today.

- (3) In **1 Corinthians 10:14**, Paul says to **flee** from idolatry. To see the practical application here, I urge you to review what we taught about the variety of things we can erect as idols in our own lives.
 - e. The point is that youthful lusts, sexual immorality, and idolatry of any kind prevent us from being vessels for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, and prepared for every good work.
2. **to be entrusted with the gospel** – Paul, himself, was tested and approved before God and the church in Jerusalem entrusted him with accurately presenting and representing the gospel as a leader and a teacher in the church, and as a missionary.
 - a. I believe this is an important principle that we as a church and the church as a whole should use in determining who should lead us, who should teach us, and who we will send out or financially support as missionaries or Christian workers.
 - b. Among God’s workers, there are those He has chosen (Moses, the disciples, Paul). There are those who volunteer (Isaiah). There are those chosen by the church or a godly leader (Timothy). And there are those who pursue a position of leadership – whether in the church or in a Christian organization.
 - c. Regardless of how one becomes noticed and considered for leadership or teaching in the church, or for Christian service and missions outside the church, we as a church, and especially the leadership of our church ought to test and see if the one being considered is worthy of being approved and entrusted with accurately handling and living out the word of God.
3. **not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts** –
 - a. There are two things I want us to consider concerning this last part of vs 4.
4. **First, in 1 Samuel 16:7**, God says to His prophet Samuel, “God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”
 - a. We are easily swayed by outward appearances, such as physical beauty, clothing – be it fashionable and stylish or sloppy and inexpensive, home, car, education, current job, and the amount of fame or name recognition a person has.

- b. Unlike us, God is not swayed by these things. I believe He takes them into account because they say something about the person that can be useful in discerning the true nature and character of the person. But far more important than one's outward appearance is what is in the heart.
 - c. For example, what are the person's beliefs, values, and desires? Who and/or what do they trust the most? How do they treat the people nearest and dearest to them? What do they fear and how do they handle their fears? How do they behave when hidden from public view? Do they make an honest effort to live up to what they know is right and good?
 - d. These are the things that matter most, for these are the things that determine the genuineness or the hypocrisy in what is seen on the outside. And these are the things that make the difference between being approved or disapproved by God.
5. **Second**, as Christians and as God's children, our responsibility and the wisest way we can live is to please God, first and foremost. To please men above pleasing God ultimately requires compromising our relationship with God, our integrity, and our character. And pleasing men requires compromising God's word, God's ways, God's desires for mankind, and God's intentions for the church.
- a. Regarding church life, pleasing men may significantly increase attendance, but it will significantly decrease the spiritual health of the church and hinder the spiritual growth of those in attendance.
 - b. Therefore, avoid leaders and teachers who entertain or make you feel better about yourself without leading you to greater godliness. Instead, seek out God approved, God pleasing leaders and teachers, for they are the ones who can be depended on to accurately handle God's word and live godly in their more private, personal lives.

III. Conclusion

- A. **1 Corinthians 13:1-2**, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."