

The Tenderness and Boldness of Gospel Ministry (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

Introduction

I am a big Houston sports fan. During the past couple of weeks, it has been disheartening to watch the Texans' management and key players at odds with one another. The team is not all on the same page. It seems like the management has one idea of what the culture supposed to be, but the players see it totally different. There seems to be lack of leadership and lack of care for the players. As a result, there is much frustration. This is a description of what is NOT A FLOURISHING TEAM. The fans are craving for both the management and the players to work together on a common goal.

The leaders and the members of the church at Thessalonica do have a common goal. They desire to bring the gospel to the lost and to help them grow in Christ. We have bore witness of this church turning the city upside down. They have become a flourishing church. These young believers were on fire for God. In chapter 1 of 1 Thessalonians, it says that the Thessalonians became imitators of Paul and his companions. The new believers just followed their example. There are two major descriptions of Paul given in our scripture reading from 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 that contribute to the church of Thessalonica being a flourishing church. 1) Paul was a bold proclaimer of the gospel. Paul was not only interested in converts, but he was also interested in helping these new believers to be disciples of Christ, which leads us to the second description. 2) Paul was a loving parent. He was portrayed as a caring mother and a concerned father that helped these new converts to grow in Christ. If we want to see our church to be a flourishing church, we need to learn from Paul to be a bold proclaimer and a loving parent.

Before we dig into this passage, let me give you some background to this text. There was a lot of opposition to Paul. His opponents tried to destroy him first by persecution. But when that did not work, they tried to undermine people's trust in Paul's message and his character. As a result, Paul defends himself by asking the recipients to recall what he had done and who he is. Let's look at the first description of Paul as a Bold Proclaimer of the Gospel. [Let us read vv.1-2, "For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. 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."]

A. Be a Bold Proclaimer (2:1-6)

1. Preach boldly in the midst of persecution (vv.1-2)

The Apostle Paul during the second missionary journey was called to share the gospel to the Gentiles. He started his ministry at Philippi, where he was faced with great opposition. He was falsely accused, stripped, brutally beaten, flogged and thrown in jail. That did not stop him from sharing the gospel to the jailer, who placed his trust in Jesus. As Paul was permitted to leave Philippi, he proceeded to Thessalonica. With so much persecution, you would think Paul would think twice before preaching the gospel in the next city.

When Paul arrived at Thessalonica, he went directly to the synagogue preaching boldly the gospel that Jesus is the Christ, who can save us. The Jewish people were jealous that people were following Paul and his teaching of Christ. As a result, they formed a mob and started a riot. It was so severe that Paul had to leave Thessalonica.

From the initial appearance, it seems like Paul's effort there at Thessalonica was a failure. But in reality, the seeds that Paul sowed flourished. Those young believers' lives were

transformed. Although they did not know a lot about the Gospel, they obeyed the teachings of Paul as they shared the good news wherever they went. The Spirit of God was moving so strongly in them that the Gospel spread from Thessalonica to the rest of the province of Macedonia. It even went into the next province of Achaia. The Thessalonians imitated Paul by sharing the Gospel boldly. The Scripture said that their faith in God had gone forth everywhere, so that Paul need not say anything.

ILLUSTRATION: Two weeks ago, a friend informed Ellie and I where to get vaccines for those that were over 65. We called to set an appointment and we received a time and a confirmation. Ellie were so excited that she quickly called all of our friends that were over 65 to tell them this good news where they can get the vaccine. She even helped set up appointments for them. She wanted to get the news out as soon as possible. Actually, we have the best good news in the gospel. May we proclaim it boldly.

In verse 1, it says, “our coming to you was not in vain.” It was not a failure. Paul is refreshing their memory by stating “for you yourselves know” in verse 1 and “as you know” in verse 2. They were witnesses of what happened. Although there was great persecution in Phillipi, Paul shared the same gospel that Jesus is the Christ boldly at Thessalonica. Although he might not be popular with men, he stayed faithful to God.

Before moving on, let me give you more context. During Paul’s time, there were many false teachers. It was easy for Paul’s enemies to lump Paul in with those traveling false teachers that were ministering merely to gain personal power, wealth, and prestige. Many critics were undermining Paul’s credibility. He was accused of manipulating the message for his own personal gain. Paul in the next few verses defends himself and clarifies his message, his motive & his method. Let us read vv3-5 as we see that Paul preaches confidently with a pure gospel. READ “For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but 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. For we never came with words of flattery as you know, nor with a pretext for greed- God is witness.”

2. Preach confidently with a pure gospel (vv.3-5)

a. The message is pure (v.3a)

Right from the beginning of verse 3, Paul makes it clear that his message is pure. It did not spring from error or originate from impurity. This word “impurity” refers to sexual uncleanness.

ILLUSTRATION: In Paul’s days, many Greek cults practiced sexual perversion. They would have sex with a temple prostitute or the cult leader. Temple orgies were common. The participants believed that when they had sex with a male leader or female prostitute, who is supposed to be close to the gods, they themselves are connected with the gods. There was a mystical union with gods. Paul’s critics are accusing Paul of the same kind of impurity. Paul denies such ridiculous accusation. Paul claims that his message is pure. [Let’s read verse 4, which explains his motive is pure. READ v.4, “But just as we have approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.”]

b. The motive is pure (v.4)

Not only is the message pure, but the motive is pure also. Paul and his companions are approved by God. They were tested and were validated. God has called Paul to be an apostle in Acts 9 and has entrusted him with the gospel. He is preaching the gospel not to please man, but to please God.

APPLICATION: There was a young man that joined a mission trip. The only reason why he went was so that others will see him as being spiritual. We might be able to fool and deceive others that are around us. But we cannot fool God because he tests our hearts. God is our witness and we are accountable to Him. [Paul preaches confidently with the pure gospel. We have seen the message is pure and the motive is pure. Now, we will see that the method is pure also as we read 3b, 5a, “For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive...For we never came with words of flattery as you know, nor with a pretext for greed.”

c. The method is pure (vv.5a,3b)

Paul denies any attempt to deceive. The word “deceive” gives the idea of bait on a hook. In another words, Paul did not manipulate things to trap people. He did not use the bait and switch method. He never used flattery. Flattery is another form of lying. It gives a positive impression to others, but there is ulterior purpose for personal gain. Usually, the underlying motivation is greed. Unfortunately, some people in Paul’s day used religion as a means for making money. But Paul did not request any funds. As a matter of fact, Paul toiled day and night so that he would not be a burden to the Thessalonians. Paul only preached the Gospel and did not manipulate or trick the people.

[Paul preaches confidently with the pure gospel because the message is pure, his motive is pure and his method is pure. He goes on to claim that he lives a holy and pure life. He is a man of integrity. He has a reputation of being a godly man. He can be trusted in the midst of a lot of false accusations.]

3. Live a holy and pure life

a. Seek to please God (v.4)

Paul has called upon Thessalonians to remember, to bear witness, to recall what they know about him because they were eye witnesses to what Paul is saying. Note in verse 1, “For you yourselves know,” v. 2 “As you know,” v.9 “For you remember”, v.10 “You are witnesses, v.11, “For you know.” Five times in this short passage, Paul calls the Thessalonians to testify for him. His words are not a bunch of hot air, but Paul has backed up what he says with what he does. Indeed, Paul walks his talk. He lives a holy and pure life.

Paul also calls upon God to be his witness. We see this recorded in v.5 and v.10. God is fair and just because He tests one’s heart. One can fool man, but no one can fool God. In verse 4, it says that he has been approved by God. He has been tested and verified. He is genuine.

b. Not to be burden to others (vv.5b,6,9)

Instead of being greedy for money, Paul has foregone his right to request money. READ v.6 “Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.” v. 9, “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 urges the Thessalonians to recall his work ethic. He worked day and night toiling. He had no intention of tricking the Thessalonians for money. Paul chose to work so that he would not be a burden to them. [Paul is urging the Thessalonians to check out his character in v.10. READ v.10, “You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.”]

c. Live a blameless life (v.10)

Paul had a consistent life whether it was in the workplace or at the temple or at home. There are several characters that stood out. Paul was holy, righteous, and blameless.

The word “holy” means to be set apart. Paul is committed to following the teachings of Christ, which are different from the cultural norm. In spite of the persecution he received in Philippi and Thessalonica, he did not deviate from God’s commands. He did not compromise his convictions like the false teachers.

He is righteous. His behaviors measure up to God’s standards. He is blameless, which means his character can stand up to any scrutiny. People cannot point a finger at him on what he has done wrong. Paul indeed walks his talk. His conduct coincides with his convictions. He is genuine and transparent. That is why the Thessalonians chose to imitate Paul and his companions, who lived a holy and pure life. The Thessalonians could testify that Paul was preaching a pure gospel and Paul was living a pure life. All that the critics had to say was false and had no merits.

APPLICATION: May we follow the example of Paul preaching a pure gospel and living a pure life so that those that we have influenced will choose to follow us because we follow Christ. The question before us is “Are we a good role model worth emulating?” [There are two major descriptions of Paul given in this passage that contribute to the church at Thessalonica being a flourishing church. 1) Paul was a bold proclaimer of the gospel. 2) Paul was a loving parent. He was portrayed as a caring mother & a concerned father. Let us take a closer look at the second part of the sermon. READ v.7: “But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.”]

B. Be a Loving Parent (2:7-8, 11-12)

1. Be a Caring Mother (vv.7-8)

a. Show gentle care

Note in the beginning of verse 7, it starts with the conjunction, “but”, which speaks of contrast. As you recall the critics are accusing Paul of manipulating the situation for personal gain. He refutes that notion and explained how he treated the new believers at Thessalonica. He describes himself as a nursing mother taking care of her own children. One of the most challenging roles in the world is being a new mother. The baby is totally dependent on his parents, particularly his mother. The new born is very fragile and needs to be cared for with gentleness.

ILLUSTRATION: I can still recall the first time that I held my first child, Grace. I was instructed to make sure I support her head by placing my hand gently behind her neck. She had a lot of needs throughout the day. The mother needs to be available 24/7. When the

baby gets up at 1a.m. or 4a.m., the nursing mom is there to attend to her baby. It requires sacrifice, availability, compassion, and love.

The word “children” refer to immature children. Children go through growing pains and encounter problems when they mature. Mothers need to be patient with them. Similarly, new Christians go through growing pains. We as God’s under-shepherds are to be patient and make sacrifice. It takes a lot of time and energy to care for children.

The nursing mother also feeds the baby. It is imperative that the mother get good nutrition so that she can provide food for the new born. She needs to be in God’s Word so that she can feed her child spiritually.

ILLUSTRATION: I know of a middle school Sunday school teacher that not only teaches on Sundays, but would call up his students every week to see how they are doing. He would build relationship with them and demonstrate genuine care for them. He prays for them regularly. He did not only do that for a week or two, but he did that for the next eight years even when they are in college. That is genuine care and commitment for the long haul.

APPLICATION: God has entrusted people into our lives. May we make ourselves available to care for them and teach them. Do we just see it as an obligation or a privilege to care for them and to help them love the Lord? A principle that someone taught me is “People do not care what you know until they know that you care.” How can we care? We care by keeping in regular communication with those that you are ministering to. Finding out their needs and being available to support and assist him. Listening and showing empathy. That is being a caring mother of the gospel. [Not only does Paul show gentle care for the new converts like a nursing mother, he also show affection toward them as we see in verse 8. “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 have become very dear to us.”]

b. Show Affection

Paul is saying that it was not enough to share the gospel to them, but also to share his life with them. This is investing one’s life to help them to grow in the Lord. This is what discipleship is all about. That is why this is one of my favorite verses. Scripture tells us that we are called to be disciples of Christ and to make disciples of Christ. We start by showing affection for them. Paul’s love for the Thessalonians was so great that he was always thinking about them and praying for them.

ILLUSTRATION: A mother is always thinking about the child wondering if he is safe, if he has enough to eat, if he is warm, if he needs cleaning. The child is an extension of the mother, who can feel what the baby is feeling. When there is a need, the caring mother drops what she is doing to care for the child. That is a caring mother.

God has entrusted us with people in our lives. How are we showing our gentle care and affection toward them? May we take advantage of these blessed opportunities.

[Not only is Paul portrayed as a caring mother, but also as a concerned father. Let us take a look at how a concerned father use his words as recorded in v.11, “For you know how, like a father with his children, we 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. Be a Concerned Father (vv.11-12)

There are three key words used to describe how Paul communicated. The first word is “exhorted”, which means to call alongside in order to speak to someone. You come along their side to motivate them, cheer them on, and inspire them to do what they supposed to do. Children crave for exhortation from their fathers. Instead of scolding the children, we are to be their greatest cheer leaders.

The second word is “encouraged”, which to comfort. It is so easy to get discouraged. One of the father’s roles is to encourage young believers to see things from a positive light. It involves empathy- where one understands how the other is feeling and be willing to stand by and to support them. Tell him that you believe in him and he can do it. Tell him that you are proud of him. They need to be infused with courage to do what is right.

The third word is “charged,” which means to witness. A witness has seen and therefore is qualified to instruct, warn, and correct. When a father witnesses his child going down the wrong path, he must respond quickly by instructing, warning, and correcting. One of the highest expressions of love is correct someone for their own good.

In verse 12, Paul explains his ultimate goal and purpose for exhorting, encouraging and charging the believers is so that they will walk in a manner worthy of God. They are to represent God well. We must keep the end in mind as we influence those that God has entrusted in our lives. We want to be a bold proclaimer by preaching the pure gospel and living a pure life. Take every opportunity to share the Good News with our family members, coworkers, neighbors, and classmates. We are to share not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because they have become very dear to us. We are to be the Loving Parents to help those new believers to be disciples of Christ. They are to walk in a matter worthy of God. As we pursue to follow the example of the Apostle Paul, we will contribute to establishing a flourishing church.