

While I'm Waiting
(Week 3)
1 Thessalonians 2:1-12
"The Marks of a True Pastor"

Introduction

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly, righteously and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you believers. **1 Thessalonians 2:10**

In the first section of his letter to the Church at Thessalonica, Paul reminds the people of just how he knows that their fellowship there is a work of The Holy Spirit and not of men. He knew that they were the genuine article, because of the evidence that came as a result of their conversion.

We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by FAITH, your labor motivated by LOVE, and your endurance inspired by HOPE in our LORD Jesus Christ. **1 Thessalonians 1:3** (emphasis added)

You see, it was their faith, hope, and love that identified them as true believers. Their witness, that came as a result of these three things, was in itself living proof that God had done a mighty work in the city of Thessalonica. In spite of severe pressure and persecution, the church had "kept the faith", as it went about boldly proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

Contrary to what some may think, it is not the work of the church to change government, enforce the law, or right every wrong in society. Paul did not journey to Thessalonica in order to bring about some social change or right some societal wrong. He went there to plant a church! Our commission is to MAKE DISCIPLES, wherever we go. The more people that we win to Christ, the better the place in which we live will become. As I am writing this, I cannot help but be saddened by the state of America today. It has become a haunt for every demonic spirit imaginable. We will not solve this tragedy by voting for the right politician. The state of our nation can only be made right by a genuine remorse for our sin and humbly turning to God in repentance.

...If My people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. **2 Chronicles 7:14** (NIV)

So, in the first portion of his letter, Paul speaks about the genuineness of the church. But in the second section, He speaks of his own. For you see, the tormentors, who longed to undo the work of Paul and his faithful companions, had done all that they could possibly do to discredit them after they were forced to leave town. Paul wanted to reassure the church of Thessalonica that he was, just as they were, the genuine article. His life proved that his preaching was sound.

Paul didn't write to the church in order to brag on himself. He was far too humble for that. But he did feel compelled to remind them of what they saw in him when he was among them, rather than have them listen to those who would slander both his character and his motives once he left town. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to examine his life thoroughly, so that they would be able to discern for themselves whether he was real in Christ, or not. This world is filled with false prophets. But Paul was certainly not one of them!

I believe that The Holy Spirit has given us this record of Paul's own personal defense for a specific purpose. It gives us a measuring stick to use to see if those who are in leadership, those who would seek to be spiritual leaders in The Church, are the real thing or no. *The Bible* instructs us to "test the spirits" to see if they be from God (**1 John 1:4**). So Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is a very good litmus test to see if your pastors and teachers are in fact being led by The Spirit of God. Paul shows us what a genuine pastor will be. He will be a **Steward** of the gospel, a **Selfless Servant** of the church, much like a nursing mother with her children, and a **Shepherd** who exhorts the flock as a loving Father. If your spiritual leaders have a genuine calling from God, then they should exemplify these distinguishing marks.

Steward

For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our visit with you was not without result. On the contrary, after we had previously suffered and were treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, we were emboldened by our God to speak the gospel of God to you in spite of great opposition. For our exhortation didn't come from error or impurity or an intent to deceive. Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please people, but rather God, Who examines our hearts. **1 Thessalonians 2:1-4**

As we have stated previously, there were those who had come to Thessalonica after Paul and his companions departure and raised questions about the motives of these faithful missionaries. Paul felt the need to defend his integrity, reminding the church in Thessalonica how that he and his friends had behaved among them. Doing the work of a missionary is difficult enough without having wicked men follow after you and try to uproot what you so tirelessly have planted. Make no mistake. Those who wanted to discredit Paul were working for the enemy.

Paul was no stranger to hardship, however, and if Satan thought he could discourage him, he was sadly mistaken. Paul was the kind of apostle that would finish what he started. Too many pastors/leaders in the church today seem to keep their white flag of surrender on speed dial! At the first sign of difficulty, they are ready to bail. Jesus said that the person who leaves the flock behind in difficult times is merely a hireling, who cares nothing for the sheep (**John 10:13**).

Paul, however, was no quitter. He reminded the church that in Philippi he had also suffered greatly in order to carry the message of the gospel. The words that he uses for his treatment there, translated "*suffered and treated outrageously*", speak of both the physical abuse (beatings) and the slanderous accusations brought against him and his companions. Paul was used to being beaten and "bad-mouthed", but he stayed the course. Why? Because he had been entrusted with God's message! He was determined to be a faithful steward of this great gift that God had bestowed upon him.

For you see, it wasn't Paul's message that he was so faithfully carrying. It was God's. That is why it was so effective in spite of hardship, and also, that is why it would be a disgrace to stop sharing it. Paul hadn't come to Thessalonica with impure motives or to deceive anyone. Many a false prophet proclaims his so-called truth in order to get something for himself. The Thessalonians had seen that all before. The false prophets who filled the temples of the so-called "gods" of the Greeks were all about using their influence to take advantage of the people. Their motives were without a doubt erroneous, deceitful, and impure. But Paul's teaching was different. He came bearing God's truth. He was a steward, entrusted with the most important message the world has ever known! Would to God that those who stand and deliver a message from the pulpit might be reminded of this truth every Sunday.

I personally am not a fan of what is commonly known as "topical preaching". Now hear me out, I believe that some pastors are very faithful in the way that they can preach topically. That being said, a lot of so-called preachers "preach" in such a way that they are proclaiming their own message, and using God's Word to "back them up" as it were. I believe that the duty of a faithful steward of God is to teach God's Word faithfully and keep one's own personal opinions to themselves. So every week, I try my best to do just that: Teach God's Word with clarity and let the One Who spoke it, be the One to use it. Trust me. If I were on my deathbed and someone asked me to send a message to the church, the best that I could offer on my own would be, "Tell them that I said hello!" Apart from God's Word, we don't really HAVE a message... one that counts for anything anyway!

Paul didn't go to Thessalonica because he thought he'd have a great time there. In fact, he went there with no personal agenda at all. There was nothing in it for Paul personally. In fact, delivering the message came at a great cost to him. But he carried the message that he had been given and proclaimed it boldly wherever he was sent, in spite of the opposition. He was a faithful steward of the gospel. If the leaders in your church are truly called of God, then they too will stop at nothing to deliver God's message to the flock as faithful stewards, entrusted to proclaim The Word of The LORD. A hireling runs from trouble, but the faithful steward of God faces it head on, knowing that the message is truly all that matters.

Selfless Servant

For we never used flattering speech, as you know, or had greedy motives — God is our witness —and we didn't seek glory from people, either from you or from others. Although we could have been a burden as Christ's apostles, instead we were gentle among you, as a nurse nurtures her own children. We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember our labor and hardship, brothers and sisters. Working night and day so that we would not burden any of you, we preached the gospel to you. 1 Thessalonians 2:5-9

Every year, around Christmastime, I dig out my old dvd of "A Christmas Story". You know the one I'm talking about. The one where the little boy wants a Red-Rider bb-gun for Christmas more than anything. (Don't judge me. It's a generational thing.) But there is a scene in that movie that I really love. They are all sitting at the dinner table, and everyone keeps asking the mom to wait on them. She quietly gets up from the table each time and serves them. It seems that every time she tries to get a bite of food for herself, she is interrupted and has to get up from the table to take care of the family, as the narrator of the story says, "My mother had not had a hot meal for herself in fifteen years."

Those of us who were blessed with a good mom, know exactly what he is talking about. Mom's are selfless servants to their children. They make sure the kids have what they need, at their own expense. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he and his companions were just as selfless, when they were among them. It is the mark of a true pastor to care more about the needs of the flock than his own. The phrase that Paul uses to describe their conduct is that of a **"mother nursing her own children"**. There is nothing in this world quite so incredible as a mother's love. It is a selfless, serving love.

I have a small flock of sheep on my farm. One of my favorite times of the year is early spring when the lambs are born. I am amazed at the way a mother ewe nurtures her little lamb. Have you ever thought about what a nursing mother does? They eat their food (in the case of a sheep, it is grass), and then they turn it into milk for their babies. This cycle continues until the lamb is mature enough to eat solid food on its own. That is EXACTLY what a good pastor should do. They feed on the Word of God, so that they can turn it into milk for the babes in Christ. Until one day, hopefully, those little ones mature and are able to raise "little ones" of their own.

Paul had every right as an apostle of Christ to ask the church of Thessalonica to support him financially while he was there, but wisely, he chose to provide for his own needs, preaching by day and making tents to sell by night. It was exhausting work, but The Spirit of God had given him the discernment to sacrifice in this way, knowing others would come in later and accuse him of only preaching to these people in order to fleece the flock. The Thessalonians would know better, since Paul had asked nothing of them, only that they accept his message of truth. He had asked nothing of them, except the ability to share his life and testimony with them.

True love is willing to serve others with no hope of personal gain. It is a maternal kind of love, that serves without taking. It is a willingness to "go hungry" until the kids are properly fed. This is the mark of a true pastor. He cares more about feeding the flock than he does feeding himself. This would be a great lesson for all those so-called "televangelists", who wear ten-thousand dollars suits and live in mansions while their followers struggle just to get by. Should pastors be compensated for their labor? Absolutely. But there is a vast difference between making an honest living and taking advantage of the people. A true pastor will be far more concerned with feeding his flock than fleecing it. He will be a selfless servant. Christ is the ultimate example of this mind-set:

Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead He emptied Himself, by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death — even to death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8

Pretty much says it all... doesn't it?

Shepherd

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you believers. As you know, like a father with his own children, we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, Who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12

Lastly, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that not only had he served and nurtured them as a mother would, but he also had shepherded them as a father. More than once in this passage he says the word “Exhortation” (**vs 3,12** translated encouraged in CSB). The word that he uses in the Greek is “*parakaleo*” (pronounced par-ak-al-eh'-o), and it literally means to “*call one alongside*”. It is a form of the word used to describe The Holy Spirit Himself (*parakletos* **John 16:7**). Paul had taken the Thessalonians to his side, as it were, and shepherded them, teaching them the way that they should walk worthy of the calling that they had received from God.

In short, Paul didn't just teach them how to “*become* a Christian”. He also taught them how to “*be* a Christian”. It is incumbent upon every pastor to teach his congregation how to live in a way that honors Christ. He shepherds the flock, so that they will know which way to go. I love King David's song about the duties of The Good Shepherd.

He lets me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He renews my life; He leads me along the right paths for His Name's sake. Psalm 23:2-3

That is “*parakaleo*”. It calls one aside and shows them how to live according to God's will. Picture a coach with his arm around a player on the sideline helping him understand how to execute the play that he has just called, and you will have a good picture of how this works. A good pastor will be a “fatherly guide” for God's “children”. He will lead them in paths of righteousness for the Name's sake of Christ. He will show them how to walk worthy of the calling that they have received.

Jesus has told us:

If you love Me, you will keep My commands. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor (parakletos) to be with you forever. John 14:15-16

If your pastor has been filled with The Spirit of God, then he will be able to call you alongside himself and show you how to live out the commands of Christ. He will be a faithful shepherd of the flock. He will exhort those he leads according to the Word of Truth. And he will also lead by example. Simply put, He practices, what he preaches.

So, how can you tell if your spiritual leaders are real? Look to see if they have been called as Stewards of the gospel, Selflessly Serving the church and Shepherding them in the ways that they should go. These are the marks of a true pastor. Be careful whom you allow to lead. Look to those who would say, as Paul said:

Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1

And let all of God's children of the flock say... TRUTH!!!