

We Don't Need Fishhooks!

1 Thessalonians 2:3-8

Strong & Ready! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)

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“Serve God with integrity, and if you achieve no success,
at least no sin will lie upon your conscience.”

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Introduction: Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 2. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “We Don't Need Fishhooks!” Paul says that his appeal and offer of the Gospel was not an attempt to “deceive,” literally, the Gospel is not a “fishhook” or a form of trickery. We need to give the clear Gospel without watering it down or doing a bate and switch.

Image vs. Substance

In 1946, when Joe Kennedy gathered his family together to announce that his sickly son John F. Kennedy would run for Congress, the family didn't think it would float. JFK was too small and sickly for people to have any confidence in him. To which Joe Kennedy replied, “Just remember, it's not who you are that matters, but who people think you are that counts. We're going to sell Jack like soap flakes”. In other words, a soap flake is a soap flake, but were going to paint him as special. Of course JFK surprised a lot of people and he far more substance than most conservatives of today. But the point is, anyone can be packaged. I think politicians and many modern day Christians have a lot in common. “it's not who you are that matters, but who people think you are that counts.” This is something that has moved into the mainstream of our culture.

We as a culture put far more value on the external than the internal. We have so many reality shows that preach that changing your outward appearance is one of the most important things that can change your life. So we get fascinated about image making.

Politicians and products have their own marketing scripts. And then you have reality TV, and the only thing certain about reality TV is that nothing there is actually reality and it is all staged, scripted and edited to project a certain image.

Churches have gotten into this. They have their own imaging companies. They want to project a certain image. “We're the cool church”. Etc.

As the old TV ad said, “image is everything.” But I've seen marriages and families that seemed to have everything together, and you'd think—nothing could ever happen to them. And then there is an explosion. And you scratch your head. And you realize that “image ISN'T everything.”

There are churches and ministries full of programs and activities, and you'd think they've got it together, and they know what they are doing. But you find out they are more concerned about image than about substance. We've all seen the number nickels noses and nonsense.

The Work of God in the Heart Matters

We are going to find that numbers may mean nothing. We can draw people with a circus. Activity and numbers do not necessarily tell us anything definitive about the work of God.

It is the work of God in the heart that matters. The whole goal in modern evangelism is numbers. That in and of itself could be a false and incorrect motive. It could be an ungodly motive or a prideful motive. We need refocus and get back to the glory of God and the powerful movement of the grace of Christ among Christians.

This is much of what Paul addresses in 1 Thessalonians 2.

Context

Lets understand the context of 1 Thessalonians 2. As crazy as it may sound, Paul was being accused of gaining people for Christ through smoke and mirrors and shenanigans.

God was giving Paul much fruit, and Paul was suffering for it. People were coming to know Christ. And there were those who accused Paul of gaining people through impure motives and drawing people the love of money.

Paul's going to put these accusations to rest. He is very clear that he is a man of integrity and sincerity as we all should be. There can be no other motive we have as God's ambassadors except sincerity and the true Gospel. We must not use anything else to draw people.

I. A False Accusation, 1 Thess. 2:3-4

1 Thess. 2:3-4, “For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,⁴ 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.”

Paul Accused

They didn't shut down or run away from the accusations. They faced them and spoke clearly and calmly to them. He knew there were others who were using bate and switch with the Gospel, and Paul had condemned it. Some were preaching Christ out of “selfish ambition” (Phil. 1:15-18).

So Paul is not offended by the accusation. Why? Because there truly is a temptation to draw people to “church” with a **false appeal**. It is quite easy to appeal to people with another savior or a false god or idol. Paul wanted to set the record straight that His appeal was the Gospel itself which had been entrusted to Him by God.

It seems Paul was accused falsely. He wasn't afraid of accusations. There are many misunderstandings here on earth. There are many opportunities to get hurt or offended. But Paul's spirit was fixed firmly on a great big God! We have to always have our eyes fixed firmly on our God.

We are messengers that have been approved by the King of kings. These dear missionaries were not afraid of misunderstandings that result in incorrect accusations.

Often false or misunderstood accusations are a great opportunity to refocus. We should always thank the Lord for these kinds of difficulties because His grace is sufficient. It is through these difficulties that Paul was made stronger (2 Cor. 12:7-11).

Feelings

Sometimes in ministry we can allow our feelings to guide us. I've known many men who have resigned because of hurt. It's a temptation – not often, but at times. At those times I remember the words of Martin Luther.

*Feelings come and feelings go
And feelings are deceiving;
My warrant is the Word of God
Naught else is worth believing.*

*Though all my heart should feel condemned
For want of some sweet token
There is One greater than my heart
Whose Word cannot be broken*

*I'll trust in God's unchanging Word
Till soul and body sever
For though all things shall pass away
His Word shall stand forever!*

A Carnal Appeal

What kind of appeal was Paul using? And what are we to draw people with? **1 Thess. 2:3**, “For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive...”

There indeed were those who were actually preaching Christ out of selfish ambition and personal “kingdom building,” who were nearby in Philippi.

Philippians 1:15-18, “Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.”

A Correction

But Paul wanted to clarify that this is not what he or the other missionaries (Silas and Timothy) were doing. **1 Thess. 2:3**, “For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive...”

‘Error’

The apostles were not deceived or mistaken about Jesus death, burial and resurrection, but declared the gospel that had come from the highest source of truth—God himself (vs. 4, “by God to be entrusted with the gospel”).

Remember, Christ Himself appeared to Paul on the Damascus road and at later times as well. Paul was taught not by men but by Christ Himself.

According to Galatians 1, Paul received the revelation of the Gospel directly from Christ. He says in **Gal. 1:11-24**, “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹²For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²²And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³They only were hearing it said, “He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” ²⁴And they glorified God because of me.”

So Paul was not erroneously preaching the Gospel. He received it directly from Jesus Christ.

Paul Did Not Have Impure Motives

Neither was Paul just preaching the Gospel out of “impurity.” **1 Thess. 2:3-4**, “For our appeal does not spring from error or **impurity** or any attempt to deceive...”

Paul’s motives were not to selfishly promote himself. He did not preach the Gospel in order to be famous or liked or rich.

Many people do that today, but not Paul. Paul’s appeal did not spring from impure motives.¹

Paul Did Not Use Trickery (Fishhooks)

1 Thess. 2:3-4, “For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or **any attempt to deceive...**”

Deceive (Gr. *dolos*) could be translated literally, a **fishhook**, trap, or trick (forms of deception). False teachers of Paul’s day often used sorcery and theatrics to appear as if they had supernatural power and thereby gain converts.² This has been true throughout the ages.

Virgin Mary’s “Tears.” One of our Spanish believers told me the story recently of his Catholic friend who as a boy would carry water to the upper level of the church where there was a basin that held the tears that would “miraculously” drip out of eyes of the statue of the Virgin Mary.

Paul didn’t use these kinds of things. He did not use guile or deceit to capture the people. The message he proclaimed was not a cunningly devised fable that he used for his own profit.

¹ Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1279). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (p. 38). Chicago: Moody Press.

II. Approved and Tested by God, 1 Thess. 2:4

1 Thess. 2:4a, “but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel...”

You Will Be Tested!

Paul was approved by God. That means Paul was tested and **found valid**. God had validated and continued to approve Paul’s ministry. We come to know Jesus and believe and repent. But our faith is constantly tested.

As ministers of the Gospel, our hearts are constantly tested. We like to say if you are in leadership at Living Hope (or any of the Lord’s churches) you have a target on your back, and you will be tested.

Paul’s Testing

Clearly God had called Paul to be an apostle; he was not self-appointed (Acts 9:1–18). He was not ministering on his own authority, but he had been **entrusted with the gospel**. Shortly after Paul’s conversion, the Lord said to Ananias about him:

- “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

Paul reiterated the truth of that concept a number of times in his other epistles:

- “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” (1 Cor. 15:10)
- “To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.” (Eph. 3:8)
- “According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service.” (1 Tim. 1:11–12)
- “But at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior.” (Titus 1:3)³

Pleasing God!

1 Thess. 2:4, “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.”

Here we find that God tested Paul’s heart a thousand different way, and He will test your heart in the same way. Why? To see his motives.

Why do we do what we do? For selfish ambition? To see our church be successful? Nothing wrong with our church growing - we want every healthy church to grow!

But why do we do what we do? To please God! For the glory of God! God is constantly giving us opportunities to prove our hearts.

³ Ibid., 38-39.

III. A Spiritual Appeal, 1 Thess. 2:5-6

A Spiritual Appeal

What kind of appeal was Paul using? And what are we to draw people with? **1 Thess. 2:3-4**, “For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel...”

Paul’s appeal was based on the Gospel that he was entrusted with by God. They did not use carnal appeals. They appealed with the Gospel!

They Did Not Use Flattery

1 Thess. 2:5a, “For we never came with words of flattery...”

They did not try to tickle their ears with some cajoling address or excuse their sin; rather, they preached Christ and him crucified. Today this is a common motive to build a church. Go light on the difficult doctrines of Scripture. Redefine sin (Jesus died to make us healthy and wealthy). Don’t talk about sin. Don’t talk about the rich doctrines of the Bible. Just psychologize the Gospel. The Bible becomes merely the map book to have a better life, a better marriage, etc.

They Did Not Put On A Mask To Cover Up Greed

1 Thess. 2:5-6, “For we never came ... with a pretext for greed—God is witness.”

Paul, Silas and Timothy did not use their ministry as a cloak to enrich themselves. They were not like the false prophets who exploited people with stories they had made up in order to satisfy their greed. On the contrary, the missionaries had waived their right to be supported financially. Sadly, in our own day, there are some who peddle the word of God out of selfish ambition and greed.

John Piper – Example of Sacrifice: I love men like John Piper who gives his books away for free online. Keith Green did the same. I think it is a mark of humble motives and kingdom perspective. I’m not saying it’s wrong to sell Christian books and music. But many are fleecing God’s sheep for financial gain.

They Did Not Look ‘For Praise From Men’

1 Thess. 2:6a, “Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others...”

Paul, Silas and Timothy did not preach the Gospel to get their names in lights. Paul did not **seek glory**—esteem, honor, or praise—**from men**. This indicates that Paul did not habitually **seek** accolades, applause, awards, recognition, and prestige **either from the Thessalonians or from others**. The only **glory** Paul ever sought was eternal.⁴

They did not want or need man’s approval because they had God’s, and that was enough. Their interest was not their own self-importance but the honor of God.

Making Demands (Like a Pope)

1 Thess. 2:6b, “...though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.”

Even though as apostles of Christ Paul and his associates **might have asserted** their divinely delegated **authority** and thereby gained some prestige, they were preoccupied with giving all the glory to God. **Apostles** refers to specially called messengers. In the strictest sense,

⁴ Ibid., 41.

the plural **apostles** was likely intended to link Paul (as one who had seen the risen Christ and been personally commissioned by Him) to the Twelve so as to identify his unique authority.⁵

So Paul did not proclaim himself as the pope. Don't misunderstand. Popery is not just a Roman Catholic thing. There are plenty of men that allow themselves to be a "cult of personality." There are plenty of men out there that really allow themselves to "become the message."

IV. The Gentleness of God-called Leaders, 1 Thess. 2:7-8

1 Thess. 2:7-8, "But 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."

Gentleness, Not Force

The apostles were 'gentle' among the Thessalonians, 'like a mother caring for her little children'. Instead of being greedy and demanding respect, they were mild, unselfish and kind in their dealings. When a mother is nursing her child, whom she loves with all her heart, she does not claim the honour that is due her, but is prepared to do anything she can for her precious son or daughter. She warms and cherishes her child. She speaks softly to it. She spends time with it. She lovingly embraces it. She is tender and approachable, and bends over backwards to meet its every need.⁶

Robert Moffat's Mother

Robert Moffat, who became a famous missionary, was leaving home for the first time and his mother walked with him for part of the way. When she could walk no further, she stopped and asked, 'Robert, promise me something.'

'What?' replied the boy.

'Promise me something,' she said again.

'You will have to tell me what it is before I will promise.'

'It is something you can easily do,' she said. 'Promise your mother.'

Robert looked into her face and said, 'Very well, mother, I will do anything you wish.'

She clasped her hands behind his head and gently pulled his face down to hers, saying, 'Robert, you are going out into a wicked world. Begin every day with God. Close every day with God.' Then she kissed him.

Robert Moffat later said that it was his mother's tender kiss that made him a missionary.

The best way to win others to Christ is not to wave the rod of authority over their heads, but to be gentle and kind. When writing to Timothy, Paul said, 'The Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone ... Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth' (2 Tim. 2:24-25). If a mother is stern and aggressive, the child will run from her, but if she is affectionate and kind, it will love her embrace.⁷

⁵ Ibid., 41-42.

⁶ Shenton, 34-36.

⁷ Ibid.

Conclusion – An Opportunity

Integrity is absolutely necessary to have lasting fruit. The motives of Paul, Silas, and Timothy were impugned, but they used it as an opportunity to glory in the great God who called them and to reaffirm their love for the Thessalonian believers.