

A True Leader's Bond of Love for the Sheep

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

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

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Introduction: Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 2. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: "Leaders' Love for the Sheep."

Charles Spurgeon Quote on the Shepherd's Love

Charles Haddon Spurgeon exhorted his ministers' class at his famous pastor's college as to the tool that the Holy Spirit uses to build up the Lord's sheep. It's not a surprise that the instrument Spurgeon mentioned is love. Listen to what he says:

"Love is power. The Holy Spirit, for the most part, works by our affection. Love men to Christ; faith accomplishes much, but love is the actual instrument by which faith works out its desires in the Name of the Lord of love. And I am sure that, until we heartily love our work, and love the people with whom we are working, we shall not accomplish much."

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The love between leaders and God's sheep is so powerful between Paul and the Galatians, that he says to the Galatians in 4:15, "if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me."

This is the very love that the Apostle Paul speaks of in 1 Thess. 2:6b-12.

Reading of Holy Scripture

1 Thess.2:6b-12, "we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.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 had become very dear to us.

⁹For 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.¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children,¹² 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."

The Powers that Be are Ordained by God

God has ordained leadership on every level. Romans 13 says, "the powers that be are ordained of God." Scripture offers much guidance, by example and direct instruction, on the

subject of spiritual leadership. From the very beginning of creation, God established leadership in human relationships. In the marriage relationship between Adam and Eve, God designed Adam to be the leader (Gen. 2:18). Ever since then, He has commanded the husband and father to be the leader of the family (1 Cor. 11:3, 8–9; Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 2:12–14).

On the national level, God used the patriarchs, priests, judges, kings, prophets, and military leaders through Old Testament times to lead His people. The Holy Spirit forthrightly discloses from Genesis to Malachi the blessings and cursings of good and bad leadership.

In the gospels the greatest leader of all, Jesus Christ, appears (cf. Heb. 2:10).¹

Metaphors of Spiritual Leadership in the Bible

Effective spiritual leadership is a combination of character and activity. the apostle views the outward functions of the divinely approved spiritual leader. He could have presented these functions by discussing preaching, discipling, protecting, and overseeing. But as the New Testament writers often did for the sake of vividness and richness, the apostle used a metaphor. He could have chosen any one of several metaphors: a steward or household manager (1 Cor. 4:1–2); a bond-slave or servant (Col. 4:12); a herald or proclaimer of the message (1 Tim. 2:7); a teacher, soldier, athlete, farmer (2 Tim. 2:2–6); or the common image of a shepherd (1 Peter 5:1–4; cf. Ps. 23). All those metaphors are replete with significance and paint helpful pictures. However, Paul chose to use the most intimate, compelling metaphors of a mother and father, which illustrate the primary kinds of spiritual care a leader must provide his people.²

I. Lead with the Love of a Mother, 1 Thess.2:6b-8.

Holy Scripture

1 Thess.2:6b-8, “we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.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 had become very dear to us.”

Birth of Spiritual Children

This metaphor of mother is not limited to this epistle. In Galatians 4:19 he wrote, as if a mother calling believers, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.” He pictured himself as a mother who first labored to give birth and then, as it were, labored longer to bring her children to spiritual maturity.³

The Authority of Apostles

1 Thess.2:6b-7, “we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.” Paul was an **apostle** of Christ, and could have impressed their spiritual authority on them, but they chose not to do that. An *apostle* is ‘one who is sent’, ‘a messenger’, and the term was in common use among both Jews and pagans.⁴ Apostleship is always conferred by a divine call, not by human

¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (pp. 43–44). Chicago: Moody Press.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Morris, L. (1984). *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An introduction and commentary* (Vol. 13, p. 55). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

commissioning (cf. Gal. 1:1). In **Acts 1:24** the prayer before lots were cast on Joseph and Matthias ran, 'Show us which of these two you have chosen'. The apostle was already chosen by God, and the only thing remaining was for him to be made known. So, when it was revealed that Matthias was the man, we read of nothing like an ordination or commissioning; simply 'he was added to the eleven apostles' (v. 26).⁵

The Well Being of Spiritual Children

Vs. 7, "But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children." As mothers are absolutely and indisputably essential to the well-being of children, so spiritual leaders who minister with a mother's gentleness, intimate affection, sacrificial love, and unselfish labor are essential for the health of the church.⁶

The Gentleness of a Nursing Mother

Paul begins with the important adversative **but**, which again contrasts the conduct of his colleagues and him with the sinful behavior of the false teachers (vv. 2, 4). Paul reminded the Thessalonians that instead of operating by the deceitful abusiveness of Satan's agents, they **proved to be gentle among you.**

The term **gentle** is at the heart of this verse. It means to be kind to someone and encompasses a host of other virtues: acceptance, respect, compassion, tolerance of imperfections, patience, tenderheartedness, and loyalty.⁷

What to Do if a Church Has Massive Growth?

There are many ministers which as a church begins to have massive growth, the shepherding becomes less and less. I do not think the solution to this is simply to stop the growth or to have small churches. There were many small and large churches in Paul's day. Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome were mega-churches, but they were shepherded well. There were many smaller churches.

I think we get a glimpse from the Roman church, which was apparently not started by Paul, as to how this might work. There were many smaller groups that would meet during the week, but then when they could they would gather together.

A modern example of this might be Pastor John MacArthur's church in California. The Grace Community Church of Sun Valley is church of thousands, but their Sunday School is apparently grouped into groups of Adult Bible Fellowships which function as little churches. Each member knows who their pastor is, and he is intimately involved in their lives. MacArthur is also involved as much as he can be.

Affectionate Bond

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 had become very dear to us."

In extending the metaphor of a nursing mother, he gives the motive for his gentleness: a loving bond of a mother. He possessed **bond of love** for the Thessalonians that could only be compared to a mother who carries an infant son or daughter on her breast. It is a nursing mother who has a naturally **fond affection** that is unequalled in other human contexts.

⁵ Morris, 56.

⁶ MacArthur, 45.

⁷ Ibid.

The Greek word translated **fond affection** (*homeiromai*; used only here in the New Testament) means **to long for someone passionately and earnestly, to bond with**, and, being linked to a mother's love, is intended here to express an affection so deep and compelling as to be unsurpassed.⁸

Vulnerability

How hard is it to truly commit to God's people with this kind of love? Isn't easy to get hurt when you bond with people. The answer is YES, but that's what makes it precious. We will get hurt from time to time by our brothers and sisters in Christ, but the bond we have surpasses the hurt. We must be vulnerable if we are to imitate the love of Jesus that Paul was imitating.

Giving Up Our Lives

It's so extreme that Paul says, 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 had become **very dear** to us."

Besides imparting the complete gospel, Paul, Silas, and Timothy shared **also their own lives**. Literally, they gave up their souls—their real inner beings—for the sake of the Thessalonians.⁹

It takes time, toil and hard work to raise babies. So it is in the spiritual realm. Babies are messy, but they are wonderful. We must work hard and sacrifice everything, for God's children are worth it. God loves them, so indeed our forever family becomes "very dear" to each one of us!

II. Lead with the Labor of a True Shepherd, 1 Thess.2:9-10.

1 Thess.2:9-10, "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. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers."

Working and Hardship

For proof of his affection for them, Paul again urged the Thessalonians to **recall** the character of the ministry he had with them. **Labor and toil** appropriately summarize the ministry at Thessalonica. **Labor** emphasizes the difficulty of a particular deed itself, and **toil (hardship)** underscores the strenuous toil and struggle in performing it. Likewise, Paul told the church that he and his colleagues eagerly ministered to them, with no desire for the compensation they had a right to expect (cf. 1 Cor. 9:7–11; 1 Tim. 5:17–18).¹⁰

Paul Lived as a Tent Maker

He and his companions lived on what he received from the Philippians (Phil. 4:16) and what he earned in his trade as a tent maker. Since he clearly stayed in Thessalonica beyond the three Sabbaths which he first taught at the synagogue, he had time to set up a tent making

⁸ Ibid, 46.

⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰ Ibid., 48.

business—which he did, **working night and day** with his hands to support himself and those with him.¹¹

Paul Supported Himself as a Missionary

Paul was not a hireling. **John 10:12**, Jesus said, “He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.”

He wasn't in this for himself. But Paul was ministering among pagans. So too, we support our missionaries on foreign fields, in pagan lands so that they will not be a burden to the people.

The Laborer is Worthy of His Hire

Of course, it is right for more mature churches to support their pastors and take them on for full time support. This is taught in the pastoral epistles, specifically in **1 Timothy 5:17-18**, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”¹⁸ For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”

The Motive of the Pastor Cannot Be Money

Peter gives us a beautiful picture of the loving motive of the laboring pastor-shepherd in **1 Peter 5:1-4**, “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

III. Lead with the Love of a Father, 1 Thess.2:11-12.

1 Thess.2:11-12, “For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² 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.”

Fathering Spiritual Children

As mature believers in Christ, we ought to be, like Paul, fathering spiritual children. In **1 Corinthians 4:15** he pictured himself as a spiritual father: “For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.”

Encouragement

Coming Alongside: Exhorting is from *parakaleō*, literally “to call alongside,” and is related to the noun *paraklētos*, “one who comes alongside,” which is one of the titles for the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; cf. Gen. 1:2; Isa. 11:2; John 3:6; Rom. 8:9, 15–16; Eph. 1:13; 1 Peter 4:14). The apostle referred to coming alongside **children** for the purpose of aiding, directing, and instructing wisely as a source of character conduct.

¹¹ MacArthur, 48.

Comforting: Encouraging (*paramutheomai*), meaning to encourage in the sense of comfort and consolation, is so critical in assisting toward spiritual growth because of the many obstacles and failures Christians can experience. Used in John 11:19 and 31 for the consolation given to the grieving family of Lazarus, the word was reserved for the tender, restorative, compassionate uplifting needed by a struggling, burdened, heartbroken child. This beautiful expression of natural fatherly kindness also fits the spiritual father.¹²

Example

Verse 12, we've "charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory."

One idea of "charge" is to "single them out personally."¹³ Like a father whose goal is the mature wisdom of his children, the apostle Paul concluded his exhortation by affirming that a spiritual father will endeavor to continue his efforts until he produces sons and daughters who **walk in a manner worthy**—live mature lives.

He knew these dear sons and daughters. He walked with them. **Walk** refers to daily conduct, as it often does in the New Testament epistles (e.g., Rom. 6:4; 2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 5:16, 25; Eph. 2:10; 4:1; 5:8; Col. 1:10; 2:6; 1 John 2:6).¹⁴

Election

He was tender with them to remind them of their "calling." In referring to the **God who calls**, Paul was again directly referring to the truth of the Thessalonians' election, which he stated in **1:4**, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you."

How Deep the Father's Love for Us

Consider how much God the Father loved us, that He gave His only begotten Son (Jn. 3:16). We are to reflect that love and sacrifice and commitment. We can indeed say, "How deep the Father's Love for us!!"

A. B. Simpson Quote

Consider the words of A.B. Simpson (Pastor who later succeeded Thomas Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London):

"Let us but feel that He has His heart set upon us, that He is watching us from those heavens with tender interest, that He is following us day by day as a mother follows her babe in his first attempt to walk alone, that He has set His love upon us, and in spite of ourselves is working out for us His higher will and blessing, as far as we will let Him – and then nothing can discourage us."

And I might add, God's love should move us to love His children like a mother and like a father. We should be reflecting God's fatherly love to His people!

¹² Ibid. 51.

¹³ Ibid. 52.

¹⁴ Ibid.