

1 Thessalonians 2:1-20
"Marks Of Godly Ministry"

If you can discredit a man, you can discredit his message. It's a ploy or tactic we see every four years in this country. It doesn't matter to me on which side of the fence you stand politically (for the sake of the illustration), both parties make it their aim to volley firebrands coated in the poison of character assassination with unrelenting ferocity back and forth at one another. **The agenda is to destroy the opponent's character, to undermine his person, so that you can eliminate his platform. In other words, if you can't trust the person, then you certainly can't trust anything they proclaim.**

If I don't trust you as a person, do you think I'm going to put stock in any kind of promise you give me? There's no way! If I can convince you not to trust someone, be it through questioning their motives, showing them as flakey, flighty or unstable... first they say this, then they say that... however it has to happen. Once I've undermined the man (in your eyes) I've taken from him, his message. You won't believe a word that comes out of their mouth, they're just trying to manipulate you for some sort of personal profit (or whatever).

This is the kind of problem that Paul faced on the regular. People following him around trying to discredit his person so that people would reject the message he preached. Thessalonica was no exception.

So when you read a passage of scripture (like we are today) whereby the apostle is defending himself or his ministry, don't be misled into thinking it's somehow because of personal insecurity. But rather, it's because he had enemies who were trying to undermine the legitimacy of the gospel! & So that the gospel might not be marred in its integrity, he would often dispel accusations that were leveled against him personally.

But as students of scripture, we love these kinds of passages because it gives us some insight into the manner, the message, the method/motive & the measure of his ministry.

Vs 1-2

So as you can see, he's already divulging the manner & dipping into the message of his ministry. & I think it's safe to deduct from what we read that those who were seeking to undermine him were leveling some fairly persuasive arguments against him!

He brings up his imprisonment in Philippi, which points to people highlighting an apparent criminal record. "This guy is in & out of prison all the time! Even civil society sees him as untrustworthy, do you honestly think God would entrust him w/a ministry!?" Planting seeds of doubt as to his integrity...

Or perhaps seeking to impose upon him motives that were self-seeking. He says, "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain." What does that mean? "Our coming to you was not in vain." There are actually 2 possibilities & it may imply both... The word "vain" could either be pointing to the *results* of the ministry or it could be highlighting the *character* of the ministry.

Paul experienced tremendous results among the Thessalonians. So he could be saying, "You know our coming to you wasn't empty, it wasn't hollow or for nothing, look around! God moved mightily, your own lives are a testimony to that fact!"

It may also be that his accusers were really trying to convince his hearers that he was nothing more than another religious charlatan (of which the ancient world was full of) & that there was really nothing of substance to his message. His presence among them was in vain, no more value (eternally) than a door to door salesman or marketer may be. (& We'll expand on that a bit in just a minute)

But Paul is saying, "You know that's not true." The word "you" is emphatic. He was charging them to remember his time among them. "I wasn't there simply giving flowery speeches & feel good lectures. The fact that your life has been changed testifies to that truth. My coming to you wasn't hollow, it wasn't empty, it wasn't vanity. Oh, you may not be able to vouch for my ministry in other cities, but you *know* that our coming to you was not in vain."

& As for being self-seeking, he says, "Even after we'd suffered before & were spitefully treated at Philippi (as you know), we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict." The word "conflict" is actually an athletic reference. It speaks of the place of contest & the contest itself. In other words, the implication is one of intense exertion, strenuous persistence in overcoming the determined opposition or dangerous opponent.

He says, "Guys, you know the shape we were in when we came to you. It hadn't been more than a few days prior that we'd been caned (beaten w/rods), placed in prison, our wrists in chains our feet in stocks in Philippi because of the message we preach!" The idea here is that of, "If we were just in this for personal profit, or some sort of self-serving interest, don't you think we would've considered a different approach when we got to you?" "Hey, that didn't work out too well, what do you say we take a little break & maybe consider a softer approach, a more "seeker friendly" approach to this whole thing?"

He says, "When we arrived in Thessalonica, our wounds were still fresh!"

“But we didn’t water down the message, we were bold (we were confident, straightforward) in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.” He didn’t take some time off & reconsider his approach. He recognized what we’d do well to recognize & that is that serving God isn’t always easy. It comes w/adversity, difficulties, affliction potentially. But if God has called you, entrusted His message *to* you (which He has) you don’t quit... Family, we’re in this for life. We can’t shy away from the message simply because times get tough.

He says, “We gave you the message of the gospel (told you the good news of Jesus dying for your sins, being buried & rising from the dead 3 days later so that by God’s grace through faith in Him you could be saved) despite the conflict & opposition.” Think it through, that’s not the reaction of people who are trying to make a quick buck or find fame & fortune at the expense of their hearers! If I’m facing a caning, or a beating, perhaps being whipped & imprisoned (if not put to death), I’m probably going to find a different way to make fast money! But their boldness in the midst of such strong opposition bore witness to the fact that God was at work in them & that their character was genuine.

Question; what is *your* manner of ministry? (Because we’re *all* [as believers] in ministry, some may do it vocationally, but every believer has enlisted into ministry). When you speak w/people about the Lord, do you kind of dance around the issues, try not to use words like “sin” or the need to repent & believe? Or are you direct? I didn’t say, “are you rude?” ☺ Some people treat boldness & rudeness as if they’re synonyms, they’re not. You can speak the truth in love. That’s what Paul did. He didn’t shy away from the straightforward message of the gospel because of how he was treated in Philippi. That didn’t cause him to cool his jets (so to speak). There was a boldness, a directness, he spoke the word of God w/conviction & assurance.

Vs 3-5

Here are a few more accusations. Paul’s opponents were saying that he was delusional, his message based in fallacy/fraudulence or (as it says here) “error”. He says their *urging of them* (or exhortation) wasn’t based in error, it was accurate. There was no unclean motive, he wasn’t in it for money, or some other form of gain personally, he wasn’t acting deceitfully. You know, the old “bait & switch” routine, luring people in one way so as to take advantage of them another. His message was clear, it was direct & it was true. & This is the nature of a godly ministry, genuine ministry. There are no tricks, no bait & switch routines, no luring people with one thing, then confronting them or giving to them another.

But this isn't every ministry's philosophy. I've known of places that have a, "Well, let's lure them in, let's get them in with 'this' (something they believe to be appealing to the world), then once we've got them, we'll confront them with 'that'". In regards to repentance or the message of the cross or whatever.

Personally, I'm uncomfortable with a "seeker friendly" philosophy. I think a ministry should be clear from the onset. Anything less has a footing in deceit, it's not really being honest. The truth is that we've all sinned & fall short of the glory of God & God commands all men everywhere to repent. To turn from our sin, to believe on the Lord J.C. that we might be saved. Because all we like sheep have gone astray; we've turned, every one, to our own way & the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. As we read in Isa 53, "*He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.*"¹ It's the message Paul gave people then, it's the message we're to give people today...

People need to be brought clearly to the crossroad of decision, accept J.C. or reject J.C. but there's nothing in between. But understand that there is no salvation in any other, nor is there any other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved. Therefore, we urge you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

But we need to understand the context into which Paul speaks. The city of Thessalonica wasn't some little Podunk town out in the middle of nowhere. It was the capital city of Macedonia, located along the famous Egnatian Way (the main road running E/W through Macedonia. There was a population of about 200,000 people (way larger than our city), there's about 300,000 people who live there today. It was really huge melting pot of people, cultures, cults/religions from all over the world.

There were a staggering variety of religions and religious professionals in Thessalonica. There was the worship of the gods of the Olympian pantheon, especially Apollo, Athena, and Hercules. There were the native Greek mystery religions. The Greek intellectual and philosophical traditions were there. There were shrines to Egyptian gods: Isis, Sarapis, Anubis. & Let's not forget the Roman State cults that deified the political heroes of Rome. & As we see here, there were also the Jewish people and the God-fearing Gentiles. & As you might imagine, the vast majority of these religions were missionary minded, seeking to spread their faith using itinerant evangelists and preachers.

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Is 53:5] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& It was incredibly common for these missionaries to be opportunists, who took everything they could from their listeners, and then they'd move on to find someone else to support them.

One commentator writes, "There has probably never been such a variety of religious cults and philosophic systems as in Paul's day... 'Holy men' of all creeds and countries, popular philosophers, magicians, astrologers, crack-pots, and cranks; the sincere and the spurious, the righteous and the rogue, swindlers and saints, jostled and clamored for the attention of the believing and the skeptical." (Neil, cited in Morris)

The opponents of Paul sought to throw them in the mix w/every other itinerant evangelist that strolled into town, took advantage of people & moved on. Paul, reminds them of the truth. "We weren't there to take *from* you, but to give *to* you." He says, "We didn't speak in order to please man (or flatter people so as to manipulate them), but we spoke in the fear of God, who tests our hearts."

You might underline that, God tests our hearts. Don't concern yourself w/what man thinks, concern yourself w/what God thinks. He tests our hearts.

Btw, let me point this out as well. If you know J.C., you have been "approved by God." Don't you love to hear the words, "You've been approved." **It may be for a loan, a bank card (or whatever). In Christ, you've been approved by God. For what? To be entrusted w/the gospel. The question is, do you therefore *speak*? Do we stay silent or water down the message so as to please man, or do we speak the truth in love so as to please God? Because we can't do both.**

Now that's not to say that we don't want the gospel message to appear attractive. We certainly do, because it certainly is! But we never change the central focus, we never compromise the message.

We never flatter people so as to manipulate them. That's what flattery is, it's not communication, it's manipulation. It's not others oriented, it's self-seeking. It's the way I use my words in order to control your decision for my own purpose... (be it to make money, gain control/influence or whatever [it's a cloak of many colors]) that's flattery. It's the opposite of integrity.

Vs 6-7

Paul says, "Look it's not that we didn't have the right to receive support *from* you (you're not to muzzle the ox while it treads out grain). But we specifically separated ourselves from the charlatans so prevalent *among* you."

Nor was his motive glory from men; fame, attention, applause & accolades. His identity was secure in Christ, he didn't need the recognition.

What are we finding here? That genuine ministry isn't about *getting*, it's about *giving*. Like a nursing mother. Paul says, "I was there to nurture you, take care of & comfort you." Btw, let me point this out. Every believer is a preacher; there's no escaping it. You're preaching something to someone just by the life that you live. It could be that your life is primarily preaching to your child/children. What's the message they're getting? Could be that unbelieving spouse, or whoever is in the circumference of your life. Be aware of the fact that your life sends a message. Paul is pointing out the pattern of his life (his ministry).

I should also say that you need to be taking care of yourself spiritually. Whatever a nursing mother eats directly affects her child (the one she's caring for & tending to). Even so, your spiritual diet will radically impact that new believer you're influencing.

Vs 8-9

Godly ministry isn't from the shoulders up (simply intellectual), it involves heart. There's sacrifice, labor, toil. But it's not burdensome because it grows or overflows from that foundation of love. Both for God & for those whom you're serving.

Vs 10-12

I just want to draw your attention to the words that Paul uses in the description of his ministry. To the positive, he uses words like, "bold", "pleasing God", "gentle", "affectionate", "labor", "toil", "devoutly", "justly", "blamelessly", "exhorted", "comforted" & "charged." That's *how* he conducted himself & his ministry. To the negative here's who he *wasn't*, what he *avoided*; "error", "uncleanness", "deceit", "pleasing men", "flattering words", "covetousness" & "glory from men".

He wasn't a, "Don't look to me, look to Jesus", "Do as I say, not as I do" kind of guy. Of course he would *point you to Jesus*, but he also led a life that *honored* Jesus for others to model their own life after. The power of Christ was evident in his life. He lived the kind of life that drew others to Jesus because it was obvious that Jesus was real & at work in him.

Now, in Vs 7 he says that like a mother he nurtured & assured them... here in Vs 11 he says that as a father he exhorted, encouraged & charged them. 2 roles there. It's been said that the father is the head of the house, but the mother is the *heart* of the house.

The idea here is that Paul not only made them *feel* better, but he made them want to *do* better.

When a child falls down, if mom & dad are both there, 9-10 times who does the child run to? Mom. Why? She makes him/her *feel* better. Dad says, "Hey, rub some dirt in it, you'll be alright, let's get up & do it again, you got this!" Mom wants to make them *feel* better, dad's trying to make them want to *do* better. We need both.

If there's a need for discipline & both parents are in the house, as a general rule it falls to dad. There's a balance of tenderness & toughness in ministry. But the goal in view is personal growth. "That you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His won kingdom & glory." That's the charge. That we reflect Christ accurately to those around us.

Vs 13

Now he shifts the focus from him, to them. Look at the platform they gave the word of God. They *received* it, they *welcomed* it & they *believed* it. They received it, that is, they took it unto themselves, they joined it to themselves. Allowed it to impact both their inlook (examining who they were) & their outlook (how they viewed the world/people around them, their own lifestyles etc.)

Why? Because they welcomed it for what it is! The word of God! Not the word of men! If what we have in our hands is truly the written, inspired, infallible, inerrant word of Almighty God, then we have a source of absolute authority that we do well to submit ourselves to entirely!

This isn't some fanciful fairytale conjured up in the mind of man. If it is, why are we even here? But we recognize it for what it is... The Word of God. & As such, we revere it, we respect it, we receive it & we believe it.

& Because you believe it, because you receive it, it *effectively* works *in* you. God's word isn't simply a source of interesting information, it works *in* you bringing *transformation*. This word "believe" is in the present tense, meaning it's continually working. It continues to heal the sin-sick soul so long as we'll receive it by faith.

Vs 14-16

Just as the Jews persecuted the church in Judea, so to they were persecuting the church in Thessalonica. But just as the church in Judea remained steadfast, so to they did as well. Why? Because what they were standing for, wasn't the word of man, but the word of God.

Listen, you need to realize that when you give your life to Christ, you'll become a target of spiritual warfare. You're not alone, countless others have stood where you stand. But it's counterintuitive.

You'd think that someone who cleaned up their act, started serving others, giving to others, leading a life of truth, integrity, benevolence, compassion & kindness would be celebrated!

Instead they become targets of persecution. The aim of belittling jokes or doubles standards. Jesus lived a life of perfect righteousness & they crucified Him. Why? Jesus said it like this, *"...the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."*² Your life shines light on the corruption of their life & they don't like that...

But Paul reminds us here that God will have the final say (always turning us to that eternal perspective).

Vs 17-20

Again, he draws our attention to the reality of spiritual warfare. But rather than be deterred, he was all the more determined... The day is coming when we will all stand before Jesus. It'll be a day of victory, of glory & of joy. What a joy it will be on that day to see those you've led *to* the Lord (either personally or through supporting ministry), standing *before* the Lord in glory.

Let's not look back in regret, let's look forward & rejoice. Until then, let's remain faithful. Let your light so shine that men may see your good works & glorify your Father in heaven...

Prayer Points:

Father, may our lives be marked by the qualities of godly ministry. & Even as You've approved us, even so may we speak & not keep silent. Give us boldness, tenderness, toughness, may our lives be marked by integrity that we walk worthy of You, bringing You glory. We pray for our community, our state, our leaders nationally, lead us back to You...

The message is clear. Jesus is the way, the truth, & the life, no one comes to the Father except through Him. He is the One who has loved you & given Himself for you. Turn from your sin, believe on Him & be saved.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 3:19-20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.