

The Gospel Preaching Part I

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Paul is now going to discuss the manner in which they came to deliver the gospel to them. From any record we have Paul was not able to spend any great amount of time there, so this church sprung up in a relatively short period of time. Paul takes special care to make sure that the new believers of Thessalonica remember the way things happened when Paul, Silas and Timothy came there.

We know for a fact that there were a series of people who constantly hounded Paul, following him around and trying to pervert his message, and slander his character to those with whom he had shared the gospel. We can find these defenses that he was compelled to make in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians besides here. So this is part of his reason for writing this section, but in keeping with the idea that this is one great love letter of Paul to this newborn church this is a sort of recounting of the romance between them. Paul reminds them that he never used them, he did not share the gospel for money or for power or for influence, but out of a genuine and heartfelt love that does not end with words, but extends all the way through to the actions.

On a note of application, it gives us a beautiful picture as ministers and witness in our day to day lives. We see this love that Paul and his company had for the people with whom they shared the Gospel, and it is a beautiful example for us to follow as we rest in Christ and share the Gospel with those people whom the Lord has placed himself near in us. Furthermore, this passage gives us a great amount of insight into the heart and life of a powerful evangelist and minister of the gospel.

1 Thessalonians 2:1

For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,

“You yourselves” here is an emphatic personal pronoun, making this a good clear rendering of the Greek. This puts the emphasis on the believers there as the authority. Paul isn't appealing to anybody else saying, “Ask so and so” but was appealing to their memories that they would not forget that this is the way it actually was.

“Know” here is to know by perception. It is in the perfect tense, which is indicating completed past action. Paul is reminding them that they saw this with their own eyes, they were not simply told about the behavior of the apostles, but rather they had seen it themselves in the past as a completed past action.

“Not in vain” The word translated vain here has the meaning of empty or hollow. This is referring back to 1:5. They didn't just receive the word. Thayer's defines this word as “metaphor of endeavors, labors, acts, which result in nothing, vain, fruitless, without effect”

1 Thessalonians 2:2

But after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

Acts 16:16-40 gives the account of this shameful treatment of the Paul and Silas in the city of Philippi. It was there that Paul cast the demon out of the slave girl who would prophecy for the profit of her masters. After she followed Paul around calling out "These men are bond-servants of the Most High

God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." Paul did not want the testimony of demonic forces anymore than Jesus did so he commanded that the demon come out of her in the name of the Lord.

Seeing that they lost a very lucrative asset the owners of the slave girl roused everybody and dragged Paul and Silas to the local rulers. It is clear that their real motivation was for money, because they were used to profiting from this poor tortured demon possessed soul. However they cloaked their accusation in worldly piety claiming that the Paul and Silas were preaching against the pantheon of Roman gods and goddesses. So they were beaten and put into prison.

In prison they were placed in the lowest dungeon in the stocks. We find that these stocks were probably little more than a hole in the wall where the body was forced in and the head hands and legs were shackled in. There were no bathroom breaks, nor was there any opportunity to stretch and relax. They were in a miserable position and yet they rejoiced and sang hymns.

Once the authorities found out that they were Roman citizens they went to all lengths to get them out of their hair, even condescending to the point of personally coming to escort them out of prison. They very then asked that Paul and Silas would just leave (undoubtedly with backs still sore from the beating and the portion of the night that was spent in the stocks).

Here we see Paul practicing what he preaches in a big way. He would later write to the believers who are in Corinth:

24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine [lashes]. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 [I have been] on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from [my] countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 [I have been] in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from [such] external things, there is the daily pressure on me [of] concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? 30 If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.

2 Corinthians 11:24-30

It is amazing to think that here Paul is teaching the truth and sharing the Gospel with the world and he doesn't brag about how God has blessed them physically, or what a great life will come if someone becomes a follower of Christ, but rather boasts in his sufferings for the truth. He was emboldened by them, never quieted.

Imagine what impact this would have on people who preach a prosperity gospel like Joel Osteen or even a Rick Warren claiming that it is our job to use worldly means to build up the Church. They all have this underlying assumption that if you are doing the right thing, obeying the right law, doing the right formula, you will get physical blessing. In contrast to this Paul constantly defends his authenticity with suffering and boasts in his weakness, not in the successes of his ministry. Even though they had received great opposition in the last place that they were and they were receiving opposition in Thessalonica they spoke out boldly because they knew that the most than anyone could do would be to take their lives, and that would be profit for them! (Phil. 1:21)

1 Thessalonians 2:3

For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit;

So now that Paul has defended themselves, reminding the Thessalonian believers that they were boldly proclaiming the truth, and they were not detoured by any threats of violence or punishment by any worldly power or authority. The word “exhortation” here is a word that would literally be translated “to call alongside” it is not a commanding or an order, but rather an encouragement that the people should join Paul, Timothy and Silas in following Christ. Now the nature of that calling is discussed.

Obviously Paul and company were not the only show on the road out there. There were plenty of religious phonies out there in the first century, just as there are now. Paul is continually drawing distinction between those religious fakes and himself. The word translated “come from” here is translating the Greek word *ek* which Thayer's defines as: “a primary preposition denoting origin (the point whence action or motion proceeds), from, out (of place, time, or cause; literal or figurative)” So, Paul is defending the origin of their message and exhortation. He starts by telling them the what were not the sources of the Gospel.

Error – The Greek word here has the meaning of to stray and wander about. So the Gospel is not a matter of simply wandering around and hoping to bump into truth. Furthermore they were not coming from the hope or desire to lead people astray. Often times false teachers are even self-deceived simply having the wool pulled over their eyes and thus teaching out of their own blindness.

Impurity – Much like our English words “unclean” and “impure” the Greek word attaches a negative particle to the word that is often translated as “pure.” This word has a connotation of sexual impurity. Of course the pagan world was filled with specific cults that were based out of sex, and ritual prostitution. Paul would have to distinguish that this was not the source of the gospel because many would at least wonder if that was a common point between Paul's Gospel and the other religions that were floating around.

Deceit – This word has the idea of deceit or craftiness. There were hundreds of religious conmen in Paul's day, just as there are now. These are people who are specifically out to deceive and trick people into a way that is false. The gospel is not rooted in deception, but it is rooted in Christ, who is **the Truth**.

This brings us to an interesting point. We often think that we can use worldly means to do the work of the Lord. As if we could spread the gospel by tricking people to come to some event and then surprising them with the Gospel. The reality is that the message is in the method. We cannot entice people to a evangelism event using lurid posters, as delegates and representatives of Christ we must be forthcoming, rooted in the truth, not compromising with impurity or deception as if “the end justifies the means.”

1 Thessalonians 2:4

but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.

Having discussed the source of the gospel and what it is not sourced in, Paul moves to the

approval of the messengers. Paul claims that God himself has given the approval to himself and his companions. Paul obviously does not throw around this approval issue. Some other places where the word is used in the New Testament are:

1 Corinthians 3:13 - each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is [to be] *revealed* with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 - But *examine* everything [carefully]; hold fast to that which is good;

So this word has the sense of approval by examination and testing. This is also written in the perfect tense. So the testing and the examination has already been done and Paul, Silas and Timothy are approved to bear this gospel.

However that is not the end of the testing. At the end of the verse we see that they are speaking the gospel not to please men, but to please God who examines our hearts. This is the same verb only this time rather than being in the perfect tense it is in the present tense, so the idea is that they have been, in the past tested and approved by God as being entrusted with the message, but God is also continually testing their hearts with a view towards approval. His reliance is on God as the only one who can truly judge the thoughts and motives of men.

This humility of continual testing is powerful and important, because it shows that Paul is never so proud as to say: "I could never get off track!" He doesn't take his special appointment as an apostle to mean that he couldn't get off track and need some correction. Just as he had to correct Peter on the issue of bringing the Law into faith (as we read about in Galatians), so he knew that he had to rely on the Lord's judgment moment by moment, rather than simply doing what he thought was right.

1 Thessalonians 2:5

For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed – God is witness -

The next subject in the gospel that is brought up is the method of transmission. It is made clear that flattering speech was not the vehicle that was used to bring people into the faith. To flatter someone in order to soften them up was a well known and despised method of getting what was desired. Even in the ancient world there was very little place or admiration for vainly buttering people up to gain their trust. This is related to the last verse, where the claim is made that they were not seeking to please men but to please God. Their purpose in sharing the gospel was not just to make people feel better, or gain the admiration of people, it was purely for God's glory.

Paul reminds them again in this verse that this is not new material for them, it is something that they know by perception based on the past events. They are not being told something that they didn't experience, but rather are simply being reminded of all of the things that set Paul and his companions apart from the religious peddlers and deceivers in the world.

"Pretext" in this passage has the meaning of "an actual motive" so it is saying that the actual motivation of Paul was not in anyway about greed. They did not ask for money, nor did they demand that they be compensated for their ministry to the Thessalonian believers. While many other religious racketeers of that day would be extorting as much money as they could for their message, much like modern day tele-evangelists. It is clearly stated, and was clearly shown, that their motivation was in no way greedy.

In order to emphasize the truth of this claim God is called to be the witness on their behalf. In other words, though, the record will not be set straight in a supernatural way until the *bema* judgement,

Paul has full confidence that he can appeal to God as the one who sees all and cannot lie to prove the veracity of his claims.

1 Thessalonians 2:6

Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

Paul now defends their character among the Thessalonians. The emphasis seems to be very strongly on humility, though it is emphasized in negatives. They presented the gospel, not so that people would praise them, or glorify them, but rather they were humble not putting any great emphasis on what is thought of them. It would seem that it was of little matter, as Paul continually claims, what men think of us, so long as we are approved by God. It would be hard to imagine someone receiving the congressional medal of honor from the President and thinking the whole time, “You know my second grade teacher just never really approved of me.”

Paul reminds them, also that they very well could have come without this humility for they really do have genuine authority from God. They could have come in with a business mindset and laid down how it is, binding, rebuking and making all sorts of messes, because that was the nature of their appointment. The word “Apostle” was not a terribly commonly used word in the first century, but it was taken by the early church and was used to indicate a messenger that had not only a message, but the authority to accomplish the task of the message. Paul and his company did not take advantage of this authority that they had. Rather they conducted themselves in an entirely different and unique way.

1 Thessalonians 2:7

But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.

Having defended their ministry in almost entirely negative terms we see the direction shift right here. These verses are fantastic, because they show the intense intimacy and care with which the gospel was transmitted to them. He describes their conduct as “gentle” this was not the sort of authority figure that the Romans would have been used to. But, in Christ, they were operating under a completely different view of what it was to have authority, and what it meant to love each other (John 15).

The simile is now used that they are like a nursing mother caring for her own children. Surely there could be no earthly picture of greater intimacy than the dependence of a newborn baby on her mother. It paints such a beautiful image of dependence and love. For, just as the child depends on the mother for food and care, so the mother loves to give that which is needed. He does not give the image of a governor or a judge who is bothered by the people, and is annoyed to have to help them, but of a mother who loves to care for her child.

A further truth of the illustration, beyond the pure tenderness of it is the fact that a mother who is nursing must watch her own food intake. If a mother eats certain foods it can cause the baby whom she is nursing to become sick, or not be as healthy as he or she could be. The mother's diet is key in the health of the child; so the teacher of scripture, the elder, the evangelist, and any believer who is a light for Christ where Christ has put him or her, must be sure to make sure that the things that are being spiritually consumed are conducive to health and goodness.

Philippians 4:8-9: Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and

if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

“So fond an affection” is a very strong term of endearment. It means a burning desire or longing for someone. This is in the present tense here, meaning in context, that they had a desire and that same burning desire continues. What a beautiful and amazing love that the Apostles had for those that they ministered to. This was no mere job, not a simple “work a day”, punch the clock at five existence. This was a ministry that was actuated by a simultaneous love for God and desire to see him glorified, as well as a deep and abiding love for the new believers that comes only from the love that is found in Christ.

The result of this love was that they were “well-pleased”, not just willing but took great personal pleasure in, ministering to them. They were not just mindlessly giving out tracts or sending out mailers, but rather took great pleasure in the transmission of the gospel. The verb “impart” here is an intensive form of the verb “to give” it has the sense of “giving-with” or “sharing.” It is not the mere transmission of the gospel, but rather life on life sharing and discipleship, there was teaching but it was also demonstrated in the lives, and that demonstration was an important part of the transmission.

The reason for the extraordinary fellowship was that they had become “very dear” to the Apostles. “Very dear” here translates the word that is usually translated as “beloved.” So the apostles wanted to impart their very lives to them because they had become beloved. What a beautiful image of people ministering to others, motivated by the fact that they are madly in love with the ones that they are ministering to, reminding them that they had no ulterior motives nor desire to gain something, but simply the love of Christ and the deep passion to share it.