

2.23.20 ~ 1Thessalonians 2:1-6, God-honoring Leadership.

Paul loves the believers in Thessalonica, and has expressed the witness of their faith to people everywhere. As we have already studied, Paul came under great persecution in Thessalonica and had to get out of town, so he went to Berea, and the same thing happened there with the opposition of the Jews who came against him and his presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He then had to leave and went to Athens, then on to Corinth from where he is writing the believers in Thessalonica.

**Read 1Thessalonians 2:1-6...** Paul urges the believers in Thessalonica to not listen to those who oppose him and Silas and Timothy; but instead to remember their own personal experiences with these men and the impact made upon them by the preaching of God's Word in the power of God's Spirit, and of course the evidence of the message they brought that has become effectual in the lives of all who believed it.

Paul reminds them that he and his companions had been persecuted in Philippi, prior to coming to Thessalonica; actually, Paul & Co were falsely accused, physically beaten and put into prison in Philippi, even though they had not committed any crime.

But Paul & Co continued to preach the whole gospel of God to the Thessalonians, even though the unbelieving Jews who followed them from Philippi continued to cause trouble and to slander Paul and bring bogus charges against his motives and his character.

Paul's confidence and boldness came directly from God, as he also had encouraged the Ephesians (**Ephesians 6:10**), "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might."

Even amid such opposition, Paul preached the good news of what God had done to redeem sinners through the grace of God made effectual by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Lord.

**Read 1Thessalonians 2:2...** The Greek word *agon* [*aa-gawn*] translated 'opposition,' means *struggle and conflict*, and in fact we get our English word *agonize* from it. It has the idea here of the struggle to keep the message accurate and biblical and to not cave in under pressure to teach something more palatable and acceptable to sinners who reject Christ; but instead to preach the Word correctly, in the face of any and all opposition, with full confidence that God's purpose will prevail (see **1Corinthians 2:1-5**).

**Read 1Thessalonians 2:3...** Paul says their *exhortation* [meaning their urgent message] to the Thessalonians wasn't done with deception or by way of any false teaching, nor was it from any impure motives on the part of the apostles.

Note: The first of the gifted men in the New Testament church were the apostles, of whom Jesus Christ Himself was the foremost (Hebrews 3:1). The basic meaning of apostle (*apostolos*) is simply "one sent on a mission." In its most primary sense "apostle" is used only of the twelve, including Matthias, who replaced Judas (Acts 1:26), and of Paul, who was uniquely set apart as apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:15-17; cf. 1Corinthians 15:7-9; 2Corinthians 11:5). The qualifications for apostleship were having been chosen directly by Christ and having witnessed the resurrected Christ (Mark 3:13; Acts 1:22-24). Paul was the last to meet those qualifications (Rom. 1:1-7). It is not possible for there to be apostles in the church today. When the New Testament was completed, the office of apostle ceased (there were only these original thirteen).

There is a more general sense in which the term apostle is used in the early church, such as in the case of Barnabas (Acts 14:4), and Silas and Timothy (1Thessalonians 2:6), and a few other outstanding leaders (Rom. 16:7; 2Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25); these apostles were called "messengers [apostoloi] of the churches" (2Corinthians 8:23).

Evidently the Jews in Thessalonica were charging Paul & Co with teaching error, but Paul makes it clear that he and his companions are committed to speaking only the truth of God and also guarding the truth of God, for during the time of Paul many false religions and cults were taking people captive with a false presentation of the gospel of Christ.

The spiritual climate in Corinth was similar, to which Paul gave a similar exhortation (**2Corinthians 4:2-6**), that he and the other apostles were "not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Paul's enemies often accused him of impurity and deceit [this word actually means fishhook, trap or other deception to catch something]. False teachers often use some form of showy theatrics or pseudo magic, in order to appear as if they have supernatural power from God; but it is anything but God-honoring (see **Matthew 7:15-23**).

The eternal condemnation and judgement for these false teachers is already confirmed (**Matthew 25:30**), "in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," (**Matthew 25:46**), "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Paul's life was an open book, there was no deception in his teachings or his life, i.e., the way he was in his public preaching is exactly who he was in his private life, what you see is what you get!

**Read 1Thessalonians 2:4a...** Paul makes it very clear that his authority and approval doesn't come from men, but from God. The phrase "have been approved by God" is worth some clarification, as the perfect tense of the Greek verb here means that Paul was tested and confirmed to be continually effective or valid by God's approval, for the purpose Paul says, "to be entrusted with the gospel."

**1Corinthians 15:10**, "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."

**1Timothy 1:11-12**, "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, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all."

**Read 1Thessalonians 2:4b-5...** Paul makes it clear that his purpose and passion is to please God, not men, and God is his witness, for God examines our hearts and is fully aware of Paul's thoughts, motives, feelings, and intentions.

False teachers use flattering words to gain influence and control over people for their own personal gain, usually motivated by greed. Paul says, not so with him!

**Acts 20:17-21**, "From Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." **31-35**, "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

**Read 1Thessalonians 2:6...** Paul had no interest in gaining any honor from men or from anything else on this earth, for his service and honor and glory were reserved for God alone, as he expressed in **Ephesians 3:20-21**, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

Interesting, Paul says as an apostle of Christ he could have pulled the "apostle card" and asserted the authority given to him by God, but Paul never abused his authority and was always seeking to be an example to the rest of the church while also being accountable to his brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul is an excellent example of God-honoring leadership, for Paul had a deep and reverent respect for God, knowing that God knew the very intentions and thoughts of his heart, and so Paul's total submission was to the letter and spirit of every word that came from the mouth of God (**Romans 11:36**), "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

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