

1 Thessalonians 2:3-8

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Paul draws a contrast: he did not preach the gospel to the Thessalonians out of ignorance, impure motives, deception, flattering speech, greed, or for man's praise. Rather, he and his team preached the gospel as gently as nursing mothers taking care of their dear children.

Paul continues to encourage the Thessalonians by reminding them of his ministry to them, and that his purpose in preaching the gospel is not *pleasing men*, but to please God. This is the way to win a prize that lasts for eternity. The praise of man fades. Praise from God is enduring. Paul and his companions suffered beatings and imprisonment in Philippi. Then they were chased out of town from Thessalonica. But none of this deterred their devotion to preaching the good news. They had been *entrusted with the gospel*, and that is what compelled them to *speak*, in spite of the immense opposition, and danger to themselves.

Paul's *exhortation* to the Thessalonians to believe in and walk in obedience to Jesus did not *come from error*. The resulting difficulty does not mean they messed up. Just the opposite. The opposition of man shows that Paul was preaching the ways of God. Neither did Paul's preaching come from *impurity*. Paul did not have evil intentions in teaching it. The resulting persecution was expected, and is a great opportunity for the Thessalonian believers. Nor did the word preached by Paul come *by way of deceit*; Paul was not lying to the Thessalonians about Jesus Christ. It seems likely Paul here is countering accusations that have been made against Paul and Silas' preaching. But Paul points to the One who commissioned him and his companions to preach the message: *we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel*. Paul has endured great persecution for the truth of the gospel. They have a stewardship that was *approved by God*.

Paul doubles down on this point, that *we speak*, he and Timothy and Silas teach the gospel, *not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts*. Their aim is to please *God*, not other *men*. If their aim was to please *men* then they wouldn't preach the gospel in the first place, because everywhere they go it brings them trouble. The good news of Jesus Christ is good news for sinners who recognize they are sick and enslaved and want to be free; but it brings about anger and backlash from men who want to remain as they are. The good news of Jesus Christ shows how to live a life of service to others that brings immense benefits that will last forever. But living in this way brings great opposition from those who prefer a life of indulgence to earthly appetites and exploitation of others.

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he did not come *with flattering speech*, and he repeats *as you know*, because nothing he writes to them is apart from their own experience. He is recounting what he and the Thessalonians themselves all went through together. They know Paul, even though their time together was brief before he was driven out of town. Paul did not preach *with a pretext of greed* either. He gained nothing of material value from the Thessalonians. He was not paid or given property in exchange for preaching to them. *God is*

witness to what Paul claims in defense of himself, *God* knows the truth of what he is writing, for it is *God who examines the hearts* of men.

Paul covers every possible reason someone might argue against him for preaching the gospel and enduring suffering, whether he is motivated by *greed* or to *seek glory from men*. Neither from *you* (the Thessalonians) *or from others, even though*, Paul notes, *as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority* to receive monetary benefit from them. On a spiritual level, Paul states matter-of-factly that he does have *authority* as one of the *apostles of Christ*. This means he could have asked them for money, and it would have been appropriate. Paul addresses this in some detail in 1 Corinthians 9, stating that one of the main reasons he did not ask for monetary support, and provided his own way, was to enhance his effectiveness in preaching the gospel. In this case, as Paul is likely countering criticism from his adversaries, it comes in very handy that he can say, “As you know, I never asked for a dime from you.”

Though he conducts himself humbly on his missionary journeys, and in his life in general, he and the others are still *apostles of Christ*. The word translated *apostles* means “representative” or “messenger.” In this sense, Paul, Silas, and Timothy are all *apostles*. Only Paul would have been an apostle that had seen Jesus, and been commissioned directly. He was visited by Jesus and called personally to preach the gospel (Acts 26:16-18). He has supernatural power given to him by God through the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:11-12). He has certain rights that he does not exercise, such as the right to live off financial contributions from those to whom he ministers (1 Corinthians 9:3).

Here Paul turns from listing what was likely being falsely said about him and his companions, all the things they did *not* do, the ways they did *not* present themselves or preach the gospel, *from error or impurity or by way of deceit*, for the sake of *pleasing men*, with *flattering speech* and *greed*, to *seek glory from men*. No, Paul did none of those things. Quite the opposite. In fact, Paul is at his most tender and familial with the Thessalonians. He was not able to spend very much time with them, and yet he and his companions evidently formed a deep, fast friendship with these believers. They *proved to be gentle among* the Thessalonians, *as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children*. You can’t get more tender than the care a *nursing mother* has for her baby. This is how Paul and his companions cared for the Thessalonians. They were newly born babes in Christ; Paul and company fed them the milk of the word of God to get them started on their journey of faith.

The gospel was shared with the Thessalonians in a maternal, nurturing way, and the friendship born between Paul and the new believers was built on this natural *affection*. Timothy, Silas, and Paul had *so fond an affection for* the Thessalonians, that they were *well-pleased to impart* to them *not only the gospel of God but also their own lives*. Paul and his team, despite the suffering they had survived in Philippi, and the suffering they soon found in Thessalonica, loved the Thessalonians such that they were *well-pleased* to endure such difficulty from their sharing the *gospel*. Not only that, they were ready to give their *own lives* for them, as evidenced by the danger they endured in order to convey to them the gospel. They endured this danger gladly, knowing that radical obedience to the gospel is the path to the greatest victory of this life.

Jesus famously described the greatest love of all was to be willing to die for a friend (John 15:13). Paul and company had demonstrated this love, being willing to give their *own lives*. The believers in Thessalonica *had become very dear to* Paul and company in a very short period of time. Paul makes this elaborate case in an effort to strengthen the Thessalonians as they endure suffering, calling to mind how he preached to them from *affection*, love, *tenderly* like a *nursing mother*, *well-pleased*, at the risk of his life. Paul did this to bring them the greatest possible benefit of life. A *nursing mother* desires good, not evil for her child. In leading the Thessalonians to live faithfully, enduring persecution for their faith, the *apostles of Christ* are nurturing their spiritual children to the best life possible.

The larger theme in this letter is for Paul's audience to live for the end times by living faithfully now. He wants the Thessalonians to "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory," so that they will be ready when He returns: "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?" (1 Thessalonians 2:12, 19). The greatest opportunity in this life is to live faithfully, pleasing God rather than man.

So Paul refreshes the Thessalonians on how strong and loving the foundation of their coming to faith was, that they are cared for and have not been forgotten by Paul. He is trying to motivate them to endure the suffering that began when he was there, because he is anxious that they might buckle under the persecution set against them, especially since his time with them was so brief.

Biblical Text

3 For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; 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. 5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— 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. 7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. 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.