

1 Thessalonians 2:9-12

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Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he did not take food or money from them, but supported himself while preaching to them. He treated them well and did not take advantage of them, so that he has credibility when he encourages them, like a loving father would, to continue to walk with God.

Paul continues to recap his relationship with the Thessalonians. He has evoked the great affection he has for them, that they are dear to him and his team. He reminds them, *For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.* It is clearly important to Paul that he show that he did not preach the gospel in hopes of material gain, or to exploit or extract from those to whom he preached. He already denied preaching the gospel with “a pretext for greed” (verse 5).

Here he emphasizes that the Thessalonians can remember that he and his team were *working night and day*, doing actual *labor*, earning money, *so as not to be a burden to any of you*. It seems likely that they worked *by day* to provide food for themselves, and then worked *by night* in preaching *the gospel of God*. It is even likelier that they preached throughout the day while they worked, probably in the marketplace, speaking with the Thessalonians at hand. We learn in Acts 18:3 that Paul was a tentmaker by trade, which he worked at with newfound believing friends Priscilla and Aquila while he lived in Corinth. It is probable that he practiced tentmaking prior in Thessalonica as well. We don’t know what Silas and Timothy did for work, only that they worked.

This was a *hardship* for Paul and his team; doubtless Paul and the others were exhausted and lacked sleep, since they devoted as much time as they could to earn their own keep and share the good news. They had little time for rest and no time for leisure. But it was worth it because Paul did not want to be *a burden to any* of the Thessalonians. Paul also wanted to make sure his witness was pure, not giving way to any criticism that he was profiteering from his flock.

He did not want to make financial demands of the people whose hearts he was trying to win over. He did not want to take food and drink from them while preaching the good news about Jesus. Later, in a letter to the Corinthians, Paul defends himself at length concerning earning his own way; it was a huge priority for Paul to not *be a burden* on others, nor to be vulnerable to the accusation that he only preached for profit. He wanted to be able to say that he preached freely to his audience, that they owed him nothing (1 Corinthians 9:15).

There are countless examples in history and present day of religious teachers who become rich and live luxuriously off the support of their followers. Paul stayed as far away from that possibility as he could, making his missionary efforts pure by working to support himself. Even so, Paul thinks it is proper for preachers to be voluntarily funded by other believers, and did himself receive support from churches from which he had moved on, such as the Philippian

church (Philippians 4:15-16). But for Paul it was a personal decision to earn his own way in each new city, making no financial demands of the new believers he ministered to face-to-face.

Paul points out that the Thessalonians *are witnesses* to how he and his team treated them, *and* more importantly *so is God*. They were witness to *how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly* Paul *behaved*. It seems that Paul is addressing criticism heaped upon him and his fellow ministers by those seeking to overturn the faith of the Thessalonian believers. Paul appeals to their firsthand experience with their team, inviting them to reflect on what they know to be true.

Earlier Paul described the way he treated the Thessalonians as “gentle” and just like how a “nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children” (verse 7). Now he compares himself to a father: *just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children*. Paul’s efforts in *exhorting and encouraging and imploring* the Thessalonians came after their initial faith in Jesus. They became children of God through faith in Christ. As such, Paul became their spiritual *father*, and began *exhorting and encouraging and imploring* them to live the best life possible. Parents desire their children to be highly successful. Paul desires that his spiritual children be highly successful. His earnest teaching was to lead them to understand that radical obedience to Jesus is the path to the greatest success in life. It leads to a victory that lasts forever.

That is the point of this epistle and of 2 Thessalonians. Paul desires his spiritual children to live faithfully each day, looking forward to “That Day”—the day of Jesus’ return, when all we do will be judged. Paul wants to continue the work of discipleship which was interrupted; the work he felt was left unfinished, which left the Thessalonians vulnerable to failure. That is the purpose of this letter.

He is *exhorting and encouraging and imploring* his readers even now to *walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory*. As he will state further on, God’s will is for the Thessalonians to be sanctified (1 Thessalonians 4:3). To be “sanctified” in this context means to live a life set apart to the ways of God. They have been called out of idolatry and sexual impurity and spiritual deadness to *walk* in a new life, one of faithful obedience to God. It is God who *calls them into His own kingdom and glory*, away from “the old self with its evil practices” (Colossians 3:9).

To walk in a *manner worthy of the God who called them*, till the very end, when Jesus returns (verse 19). Paul wants the Thessalonians to carry on with the expectation that Christ is coming back, even in their lifetime, which they and Paul believed would happen. He set this up earlier by mentioning that a fundamental part of the believer’s new life is to “wait for [God’s] Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

And when Jesus returns, that is when He will establish His *kingdom* where believers will share in *glory*. The word translated *glory* means “something’s essence being observed by a third party.” Every human desires to gain *glory*. Every human loves having their capabilities honored by others. And parents love to see their children gain *glory*. Parents attend long and often boring recitals in order to watch their child gain the glory of having their amateur piece heard by the

crowd. Paul desires to gain this same glory, reveling in the spiritual success of his spiritual children, when they are honored by Jesus for living faithfully.

The way to gain this *glory* in Jesus' *kingdom* that is to come is to live faithfully, enduring difficulty and opposition. Paul's exhortation is that the Thessalonians would *walk in a manner worthy* of the coming kingdom, implying that it is possible for believers not to *walk* in such a *manner*. The Apostle John writes similarly, that believers should "abide in [Jesus], so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (1 John 2:28). It is possible to fail at this life, even as any child can be born of their parents, then suffer a wasted life from poor decisions. This does not mean the loss of having been justified in the sight of God, for nothing can take that away (John 10:28). Being born into God's family is a matter of faith, enough faith to look upon Jesus, hoping to be healed (John 3:14-16). Birth is not something that can be lost.

But life is about the choices we make. We cannot lose our birth, but we can waste our lives. We can have negative consequences that stem from poor choices, rather than good consequences that stem from good choices. Paul desires his spiritual children to gain the greatest benefits from life by making the very best choices. And that comes from living a life of radical obedience to God (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Biblical Text

9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; 11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, 12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.