

Lesson 3

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

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II. Paul's Personal Reflections [1:2-3:13]

B. Characteristics of a God-Honoring Ministry [2:1-12]

The main theme of 2:1-12 is a defense of Paul's character against the attacks of those that opposed his teachings. While the identities of his attackers are not clearly stated, they were probably those outside the church [2:14 "your own countrymen"] who not only attacked the believers in the Church, but also their leader, Paul. By reading Paul's defense, we can see that their attacks primarily consisted of questioning Paul's character and motives with regards to ministry. By defending himself, Paul reveals to us the characteristics of a God-honoring ministry.

Characteristics of a God-Honoring Ministry [2:1-12]

1. With Respect to Preaching [1-6]
 - a. Boldness [1-2]
 - b. Integrity [3-4]
 - c. Sincerity [5-6]
2. With Respect to Living [7-12]
 - a. Motherly Affection for Others [7-8]
 - b. Not Burdening Others [9]
 - c. Fatherly Example to Others [10-12]

I. WITH RESPECT TO PREACHING [1-6]

A. BOLDNESS [1-2]

¹ You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. ² We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.

1. Paul starts out his defense by reminding them that his ministry to them was not a failure because they were first-hand witnesses of its effects.
2. They saw Paul preach to them with boldness
 - a. Despite his previous persecution at Philippi [Acts 16:22-24]
 - b. Despite the persecution at Thessalonica [Acts 17:5-9]
3. Such boldness was not natural for Paul, or for others
 - a. Paul often experienced fear and trembling
1 Corinthians 2:3 "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling."
 - b. Timothy needed encouragement to be bold
2 Timothy 1:6-8 "⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. ⁸ So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God"
4. But he found boldness "with the help of... God" [v. 2]
 - a. For which reason he asked others to pray for him, that God would grant him boldness
Ephesians 6:19-20 "¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."
 - b. Others also looked to God when in need of boldness
Acts 4:29, 31 "²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

-- To proclaim the word with all boldness, look to God for courage!

B. INTEGRITY [3-4]

³ *For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.* ⁴ *On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.*

1. There were three things that Paul states with regards to his ministry [3]
 - a. His message was the truth, not “error”
 - b. His motives were clean, not “impure”
 - c. His method was straightforward, not filled with deception or “trick[s]”
2. Elsewhere, he would state the same thoughts when defending his ministry against attackers
2 Corinthians 4:2 *“Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”*
3. Paul preached the truth with honesty, which remind us that:
 - a. It is not enough to speak the truth, we must do so honestly
 - b. It is not enough to be honest, we must speak the truth

-- Let’s strive to have both truth and honesty!

4. Paul was also aware that God had trusted him with the gospel [4a]
 - a. As an expression of grace
Ephesians 3:8 *“Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”*
 - b. As an example of mercy and longsuffering [1 Tim 1:11-16]
5. Therefore it was God he sought to please, not man [4b]
 - a. Knowing that it is God who tries the heart
Hebrews 4:13 *“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*
 - b. Knowing that this is what made him a true servant of Christ
Galatians 1:10 *“Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”*

-- Be concerned with pleasing God, not gaining the popularity of men!

C. SINCERITY [5-6]

⁵ *You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.*
⁶ *We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you,*

1. Paul did not resort to flattering words to gain an audience [5a]
 - a. He undoubtedly knew that using flattery was dangerous
Proverbs 29:5 *“Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.”*
 - b. Flattery is a tool used by false teachers
Romans 16:17-18 ¹⁷ *I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.* ¹⁸ *For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”*
2 Timothy 4:3 *“[False teachers] say what... itching ears want to hear”*

2. He did not put on a mask [i.e. cover up his real motives] to financially gain from them [5b]
 - a. Greed is another tool of false teachers

Isaiah 56:11 *“They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain.”*

Jeremiah 6:13 *“From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.”*

Ezekiel 13:19 *“You have profaned me among my people for a few handfuls of barley and scraps of bread. By lying to my people, who listen to lies, you have killed those who should not have died and have spared those who should not live.”*

Micah 3:11 *“Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, “Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us.”*

1 Timothy 6:10 *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”*

Titus 1:11 *“They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain.”*

2 Peter 2:3 *“In their greed these [false] teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up”*
 - b. Paul was careful not to take advantage of his brethren, becoming wealthy off of them

Acts 20:33 *“I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing”*

2 Corinthians 2:17 *“Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.”*

-- Win souls through the truth, not flattery, and avoid any semblance of taking advantage of others for financial gain

3. Paul was careful not to seek praise from them or from others [6]
 - a. As an apostle of Christ it would have been easy to do
 - b. He could have easily abused his authority, but he was careful not to
4. Any such glory would have been empty glory

Proverbs 25:27 *“It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to seek one’s own honor.”*

Jeremiah 45:5 *“Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not.”*
5. What really matters is God’s approval of us

Matthew 25:21, 23 *“Well done, good and faithful servant!”*

2 Corinthians 10:18 *“For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.”*

-- True servants do not seek glory from men, but from God!

[Indeed, since one cannot separate preaching from life, let us also look closely on godly characteristics with respect to conduct...]

II. WITH RESPECT TO LIVING [7-12]

A. MOTHERLY AFFECTION FOR OTHERS [7-8]

⁷ but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. ⁸ We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

1. He was gentle, like a nursing mother with her children [7]
 - a. He counseled Timothy to be gentle towards those in error
2 Timothy 2:24-25 “²⁴ And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵ Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth”
 - b. As he instructed the spiritual to be toward those overtaken in a fault
Galatians 6:1 “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.”
2. He had tender affection for them, which prompted him to share not just the gospel, but also his very own life [8]
 - a. Paul was a preacher who loved his brethren
Philippians 1:8 “God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”
 - b. For which he joyfully sacrificed his life as necessary
Philippians 2:17 “But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you”

-- Let gentleness and love for the brethren be apparent both in our preaching and in life!

B. NOT BURDENING OTHERS [9]

Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

1. Paul did not desire to be a burden, and so worked to support himself
 - a. Not that it is inappropriate for preachers to be supported
Matthew 10:10 “the worker is worth his keep”
1 Corinthians 9:7-14 “⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? ⁸ Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn’t the Law say the same thing? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it about oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? ¹² If others have this right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Don’t you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.”
1 Timothy 5:17-18 “¹⁷ The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.””

- b. Paul chose to preach the gospel without charge as a way of demonstrating his willingness to accept his calling as a steward
 - 1 Corinthians 9:15-18 ¹⁵ *But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast.* ¹⁶ *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!* ¹⁷ *If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.* ¹⁸ *What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.* “
 - c. So Paul often worked while preaching
 - Acts 18:1-3 ¹ *After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.* ² *There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them,* ³ *and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them”*
 - Acts 20:34 *“You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.”*
2. His example should remind us of the sacrificial nature of our service
- a. Some may choose to support themselves like Paul did
 - b. All should be available and accessible both night and day
 - Acts 20:31 *“...Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”*
 - c. Note also that we can serve by praying “night and day”
 - 1 Thessalonians 3:10 *“Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith”*
 - 1 Timothy 5:5 *“The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.”*

-- The main point is that our service to God and one another is a not a 9-5 job!

[Not only did Paul exhibit motherly affection and refrained from being a burden to others, he also set a...]

C. FATHERLY EXAMPLE TO OTHERS [10-12]

- ¹⁰ *You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.* ¹¹ *For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,* ¹² *encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.*
- 1. As a father [11], his conduct was holy, righteous and blameless [10]
 - a. Something he was always careful about
 - Acts 24:16 *“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”*
 - 2 Corinthians 6:3 *“We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.”*
 - b. Something that we too should always be careful about
 - 1 Peter 2:11-12 ¹¹ *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.* ¹² *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”*

2. As a father, he was also
 - a. Encouraging and comforting them [1 Thess 4-5]
 - b. Commanding them as necessary

2 Thessalonians 3:6, 12 “⁶ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. ¹² Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.”
3. For he was concerned about their walk as a Christian [12]
 - a. He wanted their walk to be worthy of God
 - b. For God had called them into his kingdom and glory

While all preachers should have these characteristics, it is also important that all members of the church served one another as Paul served his brethren!

- a. With Boldness, Integrity and Sincerity, seeking to pleasing God and not men
- b. Without Flattery, Greed, or Seeking Praise from others
- c. With Labor night and day, seeking to be Holy, Righteous and Blameless
- d. With the Gentleness and Affection of a Nursing Mother, and the Guidance and Encouragement of a caring father

Yes, the apostle Paul is indeed “A Christian Worthy Of Imitation.” For such reasons every Christian would do well to pay attention to his words as found in another place, “*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*” [1 Cor 11:1].