

What Faithful Gospel Ministry Looks Like

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

TEXT

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 “For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: **2** But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. **3** For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: **4** But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. **5** For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: **6** Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. **7** But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: **8** So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.”

INTRODUCTION

Paul is looking back at what happened when he came into Thessalonica. He tells these people, “You know how we came in. You know what we preached. You know how we treated you.” This ministry was out in the open. The Thessalonians had watched Paul.

And when you work through these eight verses, you see several things together that people sometimes separate. Paul was bold, but he was also gentle. He cared about the truth of the gospel, and he cared about the people hearing it. He refused to change his message to please men, but he was willing to give himself for the people he preached to.

What does faithful gospel ministry actually look like? Paul shows us in these verses.

I. THEY KEPT PREACHING AFTER SUFFERING — VERSES 1-2

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2 “For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: **2** But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.”

Paul says their entrance was “not in vain.” In other words, their coming to Thessalonica was not empty or fruitless. Something came from it. The gospel went into that city, people received the word, and a church was there because men were willing to preach.

But look at when they did it. Verse 2 says, “after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated.” Where? “At Philippi.”

What happened at Philippi? The Bible gives us the details.

Acts 16:22-24 “And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. **23** And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: **24** Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.”

That is what Paul means when he says they had suffered and had been shamefully entreated. Their clothes were torn off. They were beaten with many stripes. They were thrown into the inner prison. Their feet were fastened in the stocks.

Then they leave Philippi and go on to Thessalonica.

Now go back to what Paul says.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2 “For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: **2** But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.”

They had just been beaten for preaching, and what did they do next? They preached again.

Paul says, “we were bold in our God.” Notice where the boldness was. It was “in our God.” He had plenty of reasons from the flesh to keep his mouth shut. He already knew what preaching could cost him.

Acts tells us what he did when he arrived in Thessalonica.

Acts 17:2-3 “And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, **3** Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.”

That was his manner. He opened the Scriptures. He reasoned from the Scriptures. He preached Jesus Christ.

Look at the last words of verse 2: “with much contention.” There was conflict around this preaching. Paul still spoke.

What happens to your witness when somebody does not like it? What happens when speaking the truth costs you something? Paul got beaten, went to another city, opened the Bible, and preached Christ again.

II. THEY PREACHED AS MEN ENTRUSTED BY GOD — VERSES 3-6

1 Thessalonians 2:3-6 “For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: **4** But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. **5** For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: **6** Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.”

Verse 3 says their exhortation was “not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile.” Guile is trickery or craftiness. Paul dealt plainly with these people and gave them the truth openly.

Paul uses very similar language elsewhere.

2 Corinthians 4:2 “But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”

How should the word of God be handled? Openly. Truthfully. Let people see what it says.

Then verse 4 gives the controlling reason.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 “But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.”

“Allowed of God” here carries the idea that God approved them for this trust. Paul says they had been “put in trust with the gospel.” The gospel was something committed to them.

A steward does not own what has been entrusted to him. His job is to be faithful with it.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. **2** Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”

If God has put you in trust with something, your job is faithfulness. Paul says, “even so we speak.” God had entrusted him with the gospel, so he preached the gospel.

That also explains the next words: “not as pleasing men, but God.”

There is always a temptation to ask, “How are people going to take this?” Paul had a higher question: “What does God think about this?”

And God sees deeper than the congregation does. Verse 4 says He “trieth our hearts.”

Hebrews 4:13 “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

People can hear your words. God sees why you said them.

Now verse 5 gets even more specific.

1 Thessalonians 2:5 “For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:”

Flattery tells people what they want to hear in order to gain something from them. Paul says, “You know we did not do that.”

Then he says they did not use “a cloke of covetousness.” A cloke is a covering. Paul did not use ministry as a covering for greed. He was not hiding covetousness behind religious words.

That distinction matters. The issue here is covetous exploitation. Verse 6 shows that apostles could have legitimate claims upon people they served. Biblical support and greedy manipulation are two different things. Paul is condemning the man who uses ministry to make merchandise of people.

2 Peter 2:3 “And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.”

Now look at verse 6.

1 Thessalonians 2:6 “Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.”

“Burdensome” here includes the idea that they could have placed legitimate material demands upon the Thessalonians in connection with their apostolic ministry. Paul says they did not use those rights to seek glory or advantage from these people.

And notice the phrase “as the apostles of Christ.” Paul recognizes real authority and real rights connected with that ministry. He chose not to press those rights upon these people in a way that would burden them.

Truth instead of deceit. Openness instead of guile. Faithfulness to God instead of living for human approval. No flattery. No greed hiding under religion. No chasing glory from people.

Who are you trying to please when you speak the truth? That question reaches far beyond a pulpit. It reaches every Christian who knows the gospel.

III. THEY GAVE THE PEOPLE BOTH TRUTH AND THEMSELVES — VERSES 7-8

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: **8** So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.”

Now look at the change in the wording. The same men who were bold in verse 2 were gentle in verse 7.

Boldness and gentleness belong together.

There is a recognized textual issue connected with the wording of verse 7 in the manuscript tradition. The supplied King James Bible text reads, “we were gentle among you,” and that is the wording before us here. Paul then explains that gentleness with a picture everybody can understand: “even as a nurse cherisheth her children.”

That word “cherisheth” means she cares for them tenderly. She feeds them. She watches them. She handles them with care because they are precious to her.

Paul preached with boldness when there was contention, but when he dealt with the people themselves, he cared about them.

The Bible gives the same balance when describing the servant of the Lord.

2 Timothy 2:24-25 “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, **25** In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;”

Gentleness does not mean refusing to teach somebody who is wrong. The verse says, “instructing those that oppose themselves.” You teach them. You give them truth. You stay patient. You treat them as people you want to help.

Now come back to Paul.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: **8** So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.”

Look at verse 8. “Being affectionately desirous of you.” Paul cared about these people.

He says, “we were willing to have imparted unto you.” To impart something is to give it or share it with somebody. What were they willing to give?

First, “the gospel of God.”

They gave them the truth they needed.

Then Paul says, “but also our own souls.”

They gave themselves.

That is ministry. You tell people the truth, and you care about the people you are telling it to. You open the Bible. You preach the gospel. You answer questions. You spend time. You stay faithful when it is inconvenient. You keep caring about the person standing in front of you.

Paul later described his attitude toward his ministry this way.

Acts 20:23-24 “Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. **24** But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”

Paul knew affliction was coming. He kept going because he had received a ministry from the Lord Jesus.

That is the man speaking in 1 Thessalonians 2. Bold enough to preach after being beaten. Faithful enough to refuse flattery. Careful enough to remember that God tried his heart. Gentle enough to cherish the people he taught. Willing to give them the gospel and his own life with it.

CONCLUSION

When suffering came, they kept preaching. When human approval pulled against faithfulness to God, they chose God. When greed and glory could have corrupted the ministry, they refused them. When they dealt with the people, they were gentle and affectionate toward them.

Tell people the truth. Do not change it to make them like you. Do not use them. Do not manipulate them. Do not chase their praise. Remember that God sees the heart.

And care about them.

Be bold enough to speak the gospel and gentle enough to love the person you are speaking to. Paul could do both. The same passage that says, “we were bold in our God,” also says, “we were gentle among you.”

The question is what we are going to do with what God has entrusted to us. When somebody needs the gospel, will we speak? When speaking costs something, will we keep speaking? And when we speak, will people see that we care about their souls?

Paul did. That is why his entrance into Thessalonica was not in vain.

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