

## **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (1984 NIV)**

### ***Be a Blessing***

#### **Introduction**

In Acts 16, we read that Paul was jailed in Philippi. After he was freed from jail, he went on to Thessalonica. There, Paul faced strong opposition again.

In 1 Thess. 2, Paul defended his conduct and ministry in Thessalonica. Apparently, both his motives and his methods of ministry had come under fire by some who wanted to discredit him. Paul wrote to defend that his ministry to the Thessalonians was driven by nothing but a pure desire to be a blessing, not a burden to them.

Paul claimed that he dared to continue in his Gospel ministry only because God was helping him in the face of strong opposition (1 Thess. 2:2).

In the verses following, Paul gave some examples in his ministry among the Thessalonians—small examples of blessing people that had big influences on them such that they became a model church to other churches in their time).

What were Paul's examples of him being a blessing to others in Thessalonica?

#### **I. The example of right motivation (vv. 3-6)**

For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 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. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. 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 ...

Some had apparently accused Paul of being motivated by error, impure motives, and trickery (v. 3).

There's a tendency in our day to judge by the wrong standard. "Does it work?" is often asked more than "Is it true?" The test of the validity of the Gospel is truth not pragmatism. Preaching, teaching, evangelism, and Christian living must be deeply rooted in truth. But the problem is that truth can be more confronting than comforting when we say it as it is. Often this is so because we want to hear solutions to our problem rather than to see ourselves as the problem.

A man brought his problematic son to consult a counsellor.

"What can I do for you?" asked the counsellor.

The man replied, “I find my son totally uncommunicative. There must be a serious problem with him.”

The counsellor turned to the son and asked, “Young man, is that so? Why wouldn’t you talk with your father?”

The son paused for a while; seemed to have plucked up enough courage and then replied, “When we talked, my father would always interrupt and say, ‘I know better. Just shut up and listen to me!’”

Now, who’s the real problem here?

Truth can be more confronting than comforting when we are honest about it. Often this is so because we want to hear solutions to our problem rather than to see ourselves as the problem. Without presenting the truth and confronting people to face it, we can be guilty of error, impurity, and trickery even though we may be successful in drawing followers.

Having denied the allegations that his ministry was motivated by error, impure motives, and trickery, Paul then defended himself by citing three specific examples in vv. 4–6. These three verses define what integrity is about.

- First, integrity has to do with pleasing God by telling the truth and not pleasing men by telling lies. Paul made it clear that his ministry was not to please men but to please God. He and his co-workers had been “approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel” (v. 4). Therefore, they were responsible to proclaim Christ to anyone and everyone who would listen, regardless of what others might think or say. Paul was not saying that he did not care how he lived in front of people or what they thought about his way of life. He was just saying that he was ultimately answerable to God who had called him. Sometimes you hear men say, “I don’t have to answer to people; I just answer to God.” This may be just an excuse for not wanting to be accountable to anyone so that one can do what he likes. That’s not what Paul meant. He simply asserted that the dominant goal in his life and ministry was pleasing God above all else.

Paul didn’t use trickery or slick salesmanship to sell the Gospel, telling people of things that the Gospel never promised. Sometimes, in an effort to get people to receive Christ, we tell them how Christ will solve all their problems. But we don’t tell them the commitment and cost of following Christ. So they come to Christ believing in some false claims. And when their problems don’t go away, or grow even worse, they grow bitter and stray away.

To speak in ways pleasing to men may well produce a growing congregation, but the test is whether or not the people are living in

ways pleasing to God. This is not to say that pleasing God will keep a congregation from growing. It does mean that growth in numbers must be matched with growth in commitment to please God in life. Otherwise, the church may be like an overcrowded spiritual hospital—many spiritual patients struggling with poor spiritual health and needing much spiritual help from the spiritual doctors. However, if people are living in ways pleasing to God, there will be growth—both in quality and quantity.

- Second, integrity has to do with not manipulating people to get more from them. Paul defended that his ministry was not guilty of using flattering words or mask of greed (v. 5). Greed here includes that excessive desire for money. We can use our ministry to deepen our pockets rather than to build up people. Greed here also embraces the attitude of always wanting more—more money, more power, more praise, more recognition, more, more, and more! Paul appealed to God as his witness that his ministry had not been a cover to use people for his own desire to have more and more.
- Third, integrity has to do with not chasing for the praise of men. Paul said that he had not sought for the praise of men in his ministry (v. 6). There is an obvious inner satisfaction in being affirmed and praised for one's ministry. Yes, Paul had become one of the most highly praised Christian leaders of his time. But this was not his motive. Paul said in v. 6—"We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else."

Everybody enjoys being encouraged for a job well done. There's nothing wrong with encouragement. But we become a problem when we begin to chase after encouragement rather than letting encouragement come to us. We then begin to do things for the praise of others rather than for the praise of God.

We can also be a problem when we misuse/abuse our position. Paul said he could have used his position to be a burden on the church but he did not—"As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you" (v. 6b). He was referring to the fact that he knew he had certain rights as an apostle. But Paul recognized that his apostleship was not a position of power to get things from people but a mandate to proclaim the Gospel to people. Paul was more conscious of his responsibility than of his authority. We need to be careful that we do not use our position to burden others.

We, like Paul, can be a blessing and not a burden in our ministry to people. We can be a blessing when we are motivated to please God, and not get caught up with seeking praise of people and more for ourselves.

We bless people when we are rightly motivated to maximize people and not manipulate them in what we do.

Story is told of a young man who realized the error of his ways towards his girl-friend. So he wrote, "Dearest Jeanie, no words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking up with you. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart. Please forgive me. I love you!

Yours forever, Jimmy.

P.S. Congratulations on winning the lottery!

Many relationships have failed because people manipulate one another using impure motives. But the reality in life is that even with the right motive and motivation, people can still misunderstand us. How then should we respond? Nike would say, "Just do it!" But the Lord would say, "Do it anyway ... for I too have been misunderstood."

- People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centred. Love them anyway.
- If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.
- The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do the good anyway.
- Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.
- The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.
- What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.
- Paul faced strong opposition all the way from Philippi to Thessalonica as he preached the Gospel. But Paul preached anyway.

Small examples of blessing others on our part can have big influences on them.

Paul gave a second example of him being a blessing to the Thessalonians.

## **II. The example of gentleness (vv. 7-12)**

... but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 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. 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.

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

I have my own image of Paul. He seemed so stern and unbending, so unreachable and unfeeling. But his own words in vv. 7-9 seem such an ill match to my own image of him. Paul revealed a deep warmth in himself. He was a man of feelings, a man of warmth, a gentle-man indeed! To describe his own gentleness, he used the soft, warm picture of a mother nursing and cherishing her own children. The picture in v. 7 can be viewed in two different ways.

- One is that of a mother nursing her baby.
- The other is that of a nursing mother using baby talk with her child.

Either way, the picture is one of tenderness and gentleness. Gentleness is not a quality often sought today. We tend to value tough, strong, assertive people. But none of us likes to be bullied; we'd all rather be loved. Paul likened his relationship with the Thessalonians to the bond between a nursing mother and her child. Just as a mother nourishes her child through her own body, so Paul as a spiritual parent nourished his children in the faith with the spiritual milk of God's Word.

Paul and his friends were eager not only to give a message, but to give themselves as well—"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well" (v. 8). To bless people with our ministry, we need to go beyond talking to sharing our lives. The willingness to relate and share our lives with others may well be the missing link in many of our ministries to others.

The sharing of one's life is an effort towards a high level of interaction with others—i.e. the level of authenticity. Conversely, the level of authority is a low level of interaction with others—i.e. we use our authority over others to do things with them. However for relationships to be nurtured and strengthened, we need a level of interaction and influence that will bond us with people—i.e. we will attempt to do things with people not because of our authority over them, but our authenticity before them.

In spite of his apostolic authority, Paul reminded the Thessalonians in v. 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." This presumably means that he earned his living making tents even while he preached and evangelized. His reason for this was his desire not to be a burden to them. He apparently worked in jobs wherever he went so that he would be free of any accusations about his motives.

Paul wrote in v. 10—“You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.” To be “blameless” means to live in such a way that no one can successfully make a serious charge against you. It means living in such a way that anyone who finds fault with you would have to tell a lie to do it! Paul implied that no one could make an accusation against him and make it stick.

If Paul was gentle like a mother, he was also firm like a father. Encouraging, comforting, and urging were also part of his apostolic ministry. He said in vv. 11-12—“For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”

The presence of comforting is important. To be a committed follower of Christ is never easy. Failure is a regular part of the Christian life—there is no such person as a perfect Christian. Thus, comfort (rather than condemnation) must always be present in our ministry. If he had his way, Paul would prefer to use his apostolic position to comfort rather than to condemn as he ministered to people.

The goal of encouraging, comforting, and urging is clearly stated in v. 12— i.e. to “live lives worthy of God”. Having tasted the grace of God, we can only want all the more to walk in ways worthy of His love for us. God is always calling us, coming to us, loving us. The time when we have run furthest away from God is also the time when God calls out loudest to us that He loves us. That awareness should spur us to live lives worthy of Him.

Paul was an apostle to the Thessalonians. But he didn’t use his authority to demand that people respect him; give to him and give in to him.

Rather, he ministered to them by not getting them to give more to him, but giving his life more to them as a caring, comforting parent and a man of blameless character. In so doing, Paul became a blessing and not a burden in his ministry among the Thessalonians.

We bless people when we give of ourselves to build up our own character and the lives of others.

Someone has described the paradoxes of our time this way (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/30-lessons-days-paradox-our-times-weixi-tan>):

- Spend more but have less.
- Bigger houses but smaller families.
- More conveniences but less time.
- More medicine but less wellness.

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- Multiplied our possessions but reduced our values.
- Made a living but not a life.
- Crossed all the way to the moon and back but not the corridor to meet a new neighbour.
- More personal computers but less personal communication.
- Steep profits but shallow relationships.
- Big men but small character.

We have more things and achievements, but less relationships and personal touches today. In such a time as this, we are to:

- Give time to love.
- Give time to speak.
- Give time to share precious thoughts and things.
- Live our days with godly character so that we can look back with no remorse.
- Live our moments such that we can look back with no regret.

As someone once quoted so beautifully—“Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.”

## **Conclusion**

Paul gives us a profound picture of what a ministry that blesses would look like. He paints for us the images of right motivation and gentleness.

We can all be a blessing to another—to our spouse, our child, our parent, our colleague, our classmate, our friend, our neighbour, our church member, etc.

Small examples of blessing others on our part can have big influences on them.

Pray that God will use you and me as we take some small steps to be a blessing to some people in where He has placed us. Amen!