

1THESSALONIANS 2:1-4 "Men Pleaser's, or God Pleaser's?"

If we were to outline the first chapter of this letter it would include a greeting and an encouragement from Paul for the faithfulness and the love the Thessalonian church had for their area which encompassed Macedonia, Achaia and beyond.

The second chapter is more of a defense of the apostle Paul regarding the work the Lord had called him to and his addressing the way many antagonists tried to discredit him even as he walked blamelessly before God and men. And so he begins with a reminder to the Thessalonian church.

1TH 2:1 "You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure."

The NAS puts it, "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain."

The literal translation from the Greek for the word vain or failure is empty.

Paul's coming to them was with purpose, whether Paul fully understood at the time or not. In fact, you'll remember that the reason he arrived in Thessalonica was because he was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, and the next day he moved on and eventually ends up in this city which had a Synagogue where he could share the Messiah, Jesus.

He reminds them how his coming was not in vain; it actually accomplished the will of God in that they heard the Gospel and believed and their lives would never be the same, which is a continuance of the thought in verse 5 of chapter one; "because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." (1TH 1:5)

God was personally working in their lives and these people knew it. And though you and I may need to be reminded periodically, we must never forget that in Christ God is personally working with us as well.

And if we're honest, as we look at how He has taken us from the darkness of sin and it's eternal life sentence separated from God, and has brought us into the light of His Son Jesus Christ who has

given us eternal life, we have to admit that we know He has worked in our lives and is still working in our lives.

The reason for a periodic reminder is that we have a tendency to forget the great love He has for us and what that love cost our Savior. In fact, that's one of the reasons for the Lord's Supper; to remind us of that sacrifice. This is exactly what Paul told the Corinthians.

1CO 11:23-26 "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Our motivation for loving others comes from the reality that Christ first loved us. And as Paul's ministry was not in vain, as these Thessalonians were living proof of how the word of God together with the work of the Holy Spirit worked in their lives, so neither is this ministry in vain, because the living proof is that each one here who has trusted Christ has been personally touched by the living God and your growth is something which is undeniable.

And whether it is the church in Thessalonica or the Calvary Chapel in Port Charlotte, God and God alone gets the glory for the way in which His gospel comes, not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit as we submit to Him.

Paul continues to explain. 1TH 2:2 "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."

Paul begins with a synopsis of his travel log prior to his coming to them. It didn't include slides of his vacation in beautiful Samaria. He reminds them of how he was beaten and humiliated in Philippi.

This was something that Paul didn't soon forget. It was one thing to suffer for his faith by receiving blows from the rods they used to beat him across the back, but the way in which they did it was insulting as the NIV puts it.

Keep in mind that such a beating was not permissible in the case of Roman citizens whom Paul and Silas were, but then we read in

ACT 16:22 "The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten."

Before this mob beat Paul and Silas they were stripped to the waist as their outer garments were taken off and then they were beaten, adding insult to injury. They were made a spectacle.

Now, the reason Paul brings this up is not to stir up any anger or vindictiveness, but to remind the Thessalonians that despite this ill treatment he was going to be an example to them of how he expected them to act under adversity.

Notice what he doesn't do. He doesn't come strolling into Thessalonica with the attitude that, 'I'd better reevaluate my message. I got my head kicked in at Philippi for preaching the truth of Christ's gospel and so to appease the populace here I think I'll tone things down a bit.'

No, that's not what he says, "but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition."

The NAS is somewhat stronger in being closer to the original Greek, "we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the Gospel of God amid much opposition."

The word boldness comes from the Greek word *Parresia* which is translated, freedom of speech. F.F. Bruce makes the comment that this word includes the sense of courage.

Was Paul coming into town and bulldozing over these people? Is that what he means by boldness? Of course not! He qualifies this boldness by showing us that it was divinely inspired. Paul was not some Rambo claiming a courage which he conjured up from somewhere deep inside himself.

Paul was confident that God's message was powerful and that it was the Holy Spirit who brought the full conviction into the hearts of these people.

What Paul realized is what we need to continually be reminded of, and that is that the only thing we need to be confident of and the only thing that encourages boldness to serve Christ with His message of hope is that God is the one who works through His word.

Paul would not bring a message which was designed to please men or to tickle the ears of people. His message would be the truth.

Again, F.F. Bruce quoting van Unnik..... "his gospel is not according to man (Gal.1:11), and therefore provokes opposition; but Paul has not adulterated the gospel. The word freedom of speech has here its place in the missionary-practice of the apostle: it comprises both the full truth of the gospel and full freedom towards the judgment of men."

By the judgment of men we must understand that judgment is proclaimed in the gospel. If men reject the gospel they will be judged guilty by God for their own sin and denial of God's provision for sin and they will eternally suffer that judgment.

If men accept the gospel the judgment still exists but it now falls to Jesus Christ who has paid that price for the sins of all who embrace Him and His provision by faith.

This is why Paul could get beat up and then move to the next town with the same message of hope. Of course, it wasn't as though his preaching in Philippi was fruitless. His vision from God told him to go to Macedonia and there Lydia and her household were saved along with the Philippian jailer and his household; and who knows who else?

Paul knew that. And he knew that if God could save some in Philippi then He could save some in Thessalonica and he didn't want to be accused before God or men of not being faithful to God with this message of hope, knowing that the boldness came from God the Holy Spirit who enabled him to be faithful, even amid much opposition.

Whatever you do for the Lord, however, please don't mistake boldness for rudeness. Paul was very sensitive to the needs of people, he just didn't compromise the truth. If you have opportunity to share Christ with someone do it with the boldness that what you're saying is the truth, it's not error or falsehood, but the very word of God.

This is what Paul says in 1TH 2:3 "For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you."

When you are equipped with God's truth you don't need to fear that someone will make fun of you, even if they do. Because it's not

your truth you're defending anyhow. It's God's truth and He's big enough to defend Himself. Just lovingly proclaim the gospel.

Paul also says he didn't come to the Thessalonians with impure motives, nor was he trying to trick them.

The reason Paul would even have to mention this is because of what was going on in the world at that time with traveling salesman peddling their philosophical and magical wares.

They would come into a town, and with flattery of speech convince people that they were prophets, and that for a fee they could tell the future or guarantee success with their help or maybe give deep secrets of knowledge that would enable someone to prosper, all at a cost.

And here comes Paul with a brand new teaching which most of these people had never heard of and I'm sure many of them put him into the same category as did the Athenians; 'another idle babbler wishing to get into our pockets.'

Paul say's, that never entered my mind because I never wanted to take advantage of any of you. And yet how sad it is when in the name of Christ people are being taken advantage of as they're separated from their money or time or the truth of God's word with someone who would compromise the truth or embellish it to gain an advantage.

According to a recent article in the summer edition of the Christian Research Journal, Evangelist Robert Tilton whose "Success-N-Life" T.V. show ranks 12th in the national Arbitron ratings for syndicated religious television programs, came under investigation for possible mail fraud.

Quoting the Journal, "By this last July Tilton was facing at least nine civil suits with claims totaling roughly \$500 million. One was filed by the widow of Tilton supporter Tom Crowley, who was still receiving the minister's fundraising appeals five months after her husband's death. One such letter said: (quoting Tilton) "God spoke to me this morning specifically about you, Tom, and He's going to heal you. Crowley had paid Tilton a \$100 "vow of faith" in the hopes of recovering."

Where is the integrity, where is the honesty, where is the attitude of Paul? "For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you."

Paul never lost sight of his responsibility to God to handle accurately the word of God. He never lost sight of the fact that as the writer of Hebrews says, God's "leaders watch over your souls as those who will give an account."

Paul didn't want to stand before God one day and have to explain why he foolishly used the wisdom and the motivation of the world to advance the message of God's heavenly kingdom.

Notice what he says in verse 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."

Paul was entrusted with the Gospel by His very Savior, Jesus Christ. And if you're a child of God you too have been entrusted with the Gospel, as well as the responsibility to walk according to the message of that Gospel, which is that freedom from the penalty of sin in Christ behooves us to walk as those who are no longer bound by sin, but freed servants of the Lord.

Now there's a sense here in this verse which alludes to the degree of responsibility that is given to us by Christ. The phrase, "men approved by God", is an interesting one because it speaks of a testing and the passing of that test.

In the KJV, instead of the word approved, the word "allowed" is used. "We were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel". From the Pulpit commentary, P.J. Gloag says that "the old English word "allowed" signifies tried, tested as gold is tested in the fire, and hence also the result of that trial, "approved".

In fact, that it is exactly what the original Greek denotes. Dr. George Milligan who is well known among serious students of the N.T. for his famous work called the Vocabulary of the Greek N.T., which he co-authored with Dr. J.H. Moulton, writes, "*Dokimazo* means originally 'put to the test', but in the N.T. generally conveys the added thought that the test has been successfully surmounted in accordance with the technical use of the word (in classical Greek) to describe the passing as fit for election to a public office" as its found in Plato's writings for example."

Paul's passing of the test, if you will, came from his faithfulness to the God who was faithful to bring him from darkness to light and Who remained faithful to equip and strengthen Paul for the task.

Now, here's the connection to you and me. God has loved us with an everlasting love, He has given us eternal life. And He desires that we be approved for service unto His honor and glory.

I've run into lots of people over the years who want the glory of some position in the church but who have not been approved or tested to the extent that they've gone through the refining process as with gold and are simply not ready for such a position.

I've run into other people who feel they've never passed any test and therefore should not be serving in any capacity. The Lord has called every one of His people to be His servant, without exception.

We can't use the excuse that since I feel unworthy to serve Christ therefore I won't. Let me put service into perspective for you. Not everyone will be a Pastor, not everyone will be a teacher, not everyone will have gifts which are usually associated with a high profile nature as with a Billy Graham, but service starts in the home and with friends and brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Every one of us have been called to encourage each other to love and good works. Every one of us have been called and equipped by Christ to love because Christ first loved us. Essentially, every single day we are tested by God. The question is are we passing even the most elementary test where we can come out approved?

Being approved or passing the test is not an option, it's a command. But, with the command from God we have the ability, by the power of the Spirit, to run the race and be the victor to God's honor and glory. This is what Paul told the Corinthians.

1CO 9:24-27 "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

Paul says, 'we have been called to run a race set before us by God, and whatever your individual race happens to be, "the long jump, the 100 meter, the 1000 meter relay, do it with the attitude of pleasing the Head of your kingdom, who is your Lord and God.'

My participation is something like a coach and one who encourages you to stay true to your race. If your test is to be a better husband or wife or father or mother, then run that race and ask God to continually strengthen you when you become weary. If you will be faithful to come to Him, He will be faithful to give you what you need to be found approved and ready for the next race.

If your race involves simply maturing in the Lord, if you're a new Christian, then run that race daily with all your might as you rely on the strength of our Almighty God.

If you've got a desire to be more involved in different ministries here at Calvary Chapel, then get in the race and see how God can direct you and use you and how, if you're faithful to Him, you can be found approved to serve in whatever capacity, through Him, as you are faithful to keep running by His strength.

Paul was found approved. It's not as though he was perfect. He sinned like we all do, but his heart's desire was to go where God commanded. And if that meant going into the lion's den then he would go.

If you and I would be that committed, there isn't anything that God couldn't accomplish through us and this church. We, like Paul, have been entrusted with the Gospel.

Notice in this verse that since he has been given this great privilege of being entrusted with something from God, he speaks about it. He doesn't hide it under a bushel.

But his speech comes from a motivation to please God, not men, because he knows that the only one who ultimately counts is God. This is why he says at the end of this verse, "We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts."

Donald Grey Barnhouse makes this observation. He says in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians, "Paul says that God tests our hearts. He was very conscious of the fact that God one day would say, 'Paul, I gave you the truth. What did you do with it?'"

As children of God who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sin and the gift of eternal life, we too will stand before God and He'll ask, 'what did you do with My truth?'

Now, before you go into a panic thinking that you will never match up to Paul or that you haven't been as faithful as you know you

should be, let me just tell you that none of us are as faithful as we should be.

But, we can't use that as an excuse to continue to go our own way without getting in the race God has set before each one of us. And remember, He's the One who has called us and He's the One who will empower us as we will love and submit to Him.

Is your concern, regarding the race God has you in, with how others will see you, or is it with knowing that God is the One who is examining or testing your heart? There's that same word *Dokimazo*, testing, with the idea of passing the test.

The only way you'll pass the test is if you get in the race. It's not an option, but I'll guarantee you that as you run to Him and with Him, He will give you a such a desire to want to run in such a way as to win for Him, knowing the victory is already His which He shares with us.

And believe me He will give you that imperishable crown which will last forever, and you will never have to be ashamed in this life or the next to be associated with the King of kings whom we represent in the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God.