

1 THESSALONIANS 2:5-8 "Give and Live the Truth"

1 Thessalonians 2:5-8 ⁵ For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed-- God is witness-- ⁶ nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. ⁷ But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. ⁸ Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

As we saw last week Paul's intent for this part of the letter to the Thessalonians was to dismiss any doubt about his motives for coming to them.

As we left off in verse 4 Paul reminds them that God is the One who entrusted him with his ministry and the message of the gospel which that ministry was built on. And by the words, "we have been approved by God", Paul demonstrates that his ministry was not one of just words, but of works through the power of the Holy Spirit, which showed that he had been faithful to God and that God in turn was faithful to use him.

In that faithfulness to God in the small things, God entrusted him with more and more to the extent that he began to exercise his calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

It didn't start out that way. It was years after the Damascus road experience with Christ that Paul finally was commissioned by the Holy Spirit in Antioch to be sent out specifically to the Gentiles.

ACT 13:1-4 "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴ The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus."

God had always intended for Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles, but it wasn't until God's timing that he was actually commissioned to that work by the Holy Spirit. And we see that God worked in

conjunction with the church which recognized God's calling on Paul through the laying on of hands, by the leaders in that church at Antioch, after much prayer.

It's not as though Paul thought it would be a good idea to be an apostle and venture out on his own, which would have been nothing short of disobedience to God. He only ventured where God clearly showed the way and opened the doors. But you'll notice that Christ never commissions and calls a person outside of the very institution He established, which is the church.

The church isn't man's institution, it's God's and it's meant to be a safeguard and a means of accountability. Whenever there's a problem related to God's people in Christ it is to be dealt with within the biblical parameters that Christ has established; the expression of which is found in the local body as it is faithful to use the word of God alone as its final authority.

Here in this letter to the Thessalonians Paul shows them that he is one to follow Christ.

1Thes. 1:5-6, "our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."

Paul was not being presumptuous to be "holier than thou" so that he could be the standard by which everyone else must walk. He was only saying that as he followed Christ and was an example through the Spirit's power, so they could follow his example.

And now in verse 5 Paul reminds them of how he followed Christ and was demonstrating in very practical ways that he had no hidden agenda for the Kingdom of God.

Paul was very much in the open, in the light where all could see. He had nothing to hide. Look at verse 5, "You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed--God is our witness."

It's not as though the Thessalonian church heard reports of Paul's actions. These people, Paul says, personally knew how Paul conducted himself and therefore they should not be swayed by what other people report, who never sat under his ministry or who

only wanted to discredit him, because they didn't agree with what he was doing.

Is there a question with flattery or flattering speech on Paul's part? Paul intimates, 'bring them on who accuse me and I will direct them to you to set them straight, because you know better.'

Now, the idea of flattering speech is set in the context of this verse which goes on to say, "nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed."

The NAS says, "nor with a pretext for greed", while the KJV uses the phrase, "nor a cloak of covetousness."

Robertson in his Word Pictures in the N.T., says that this is the charge of self-interest rather than the mere desire to please people.

Flattery in the context of greed or covetousness, as the KJV puts it, has at its root the motivation to get ahead at the expense of others. F.F. Bruce quoting the couplet of La Fontaine: "Learn that every flatterer lives at the flattered listener's cost."

God has something to say about this as well in other portions of scripture.

MAR 7:18-23 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? 19 For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.") 20 He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' 21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"

Here greed or covetousness is put into the same company as sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. And they're all called evils which come from the inside, that is, the heart.

This is a heart thing which Paul is dealing with. He reminds the Thessalonians that his heart was pure as he served them. In fact, in Acts 20 Paul essentially said the same thing to the Ephesian church as he was about to leave them.

ACT 20:33 "I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul was always being an example. And he could be an example because his heart was set to love, worship and serve his God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who first loved him.

This is the only way we will be effective servants to each other and the world, and that is, to be first and foremost a servant of Jesus, with an attitude of following Him in everything according to His word.

The heart can be deceitful. And there are those who will say they have sought God above all, and have desired to do His will. But, when the rubber meets the road, as Dr. J. Vernon McGee liked to say, the true Godly heart will always be humble and never bring attention to itself and it will always be in accord with God's word.

This is why Paul can say in our text, "God is witness." These Thessalonians were witnesses of Paul's life and now Paul, knowing that this is a heart matter, calls upon the only One who truly knows the heart. God is witness.

This by the way, was the normal way of taking an oath. You always call upon one who is above you to be a witness. In the Pagan world, the false gods were called upon. In the Kingdom of God the one true God is higher than all because He is Creator. And being Creator, He knows all things. And knowing all things Paul can call upon Him with confidence to witness his heart actions.

Taking an oath is no light matter, which is why in most cases our yes should be yes and our no should be no. But, here even the apostle Paul utilizes an oath before God, not to further his own ways but to assure and bless the church which could have been swayed by evil-doers trying to destroy the work.

Paul continues in verse 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,..."

Again, the motivation of their hearts was not to selfishly look for praise from men to make them feel worthy, but to know that God was pleased with them as they were faithful to Him, whether any men saw or acknowledged their work.

This is a tough area for human beings, who by nature, want to be noticed. And there doesn't have to be anything sinful about that human trait until we go looking for such recognition or when our motivation is to that end.

If we're truly seeking to serve Christ from pure motives, we can do it whether people recognize us or not, knowing that it pleases our God and Savior. And that's the thing which will keep us faithful when men disappoint us and take advantage of us.

If you don't understand this you will spend your Christian walk always feeling sorry for yourself when things don't seem to work out just the way you expect, or when you feel that you didn't get the recognition from men you expected. Again, what is our motivation?

If you're desiring to love God and men then you must understand that love will manifest itself in an unselfish way as Paul says to the Corinthians.

1CO 13:4-5 "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking,...."

And this is the point Paul is making back in our text. He, unlike many other men pleasers who are coming with flattery of speech to enhance their own reputation at the expense of others, desires to only give glory to God, not to seek the glory from men.

Now, it's not as though Paul was relinquishing the position and the authority Christ had given him by down-playing the fact that he was an apostle.

He continues in verse 6, "As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you,"

The NAS puts it, "even though as apostles we could have asserted our authority."

Some commentators believe that Paul means here that he could have asserted his authority to expect that the Thessalonians should

support him financially so he could carry on the work without hindrance.

Other commentators believe that the inference is to glory in the sense of honor or importance. I suspect that both ideas are suggested by Paul since in the context of this letter he speaks of financial support and the idea of being honored as an apostle.

And so what we see before us is Paul saying, that he didn't demand anything from them in the way of honor or of his financial needs being met, but through his example they more than likely did honor him as God's servant and felt compassion on him to do anything they could to help him in the work, including his support, even though in a limited way.

He wasn't overbearing, nor lording his authority over them. However, we should never think that just because he was meek that he was a doormat that anyone could walk over. Like the expression goes, "don't confuse humility or meekness with weakness."

When it was appropriate Paul did not back down, nor did he let those within the Body of Christ try to destroy the church through false doctrine or wrong motives. He confronted them, and when it called for it he cut it out at the leading of the Holy Spirit without apology.

But, in the case of the Thessalonians this kind of action was not necessary because they heeded what would later be written in Hebrews.

Heb. 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Paul's' working with them was a joy as we see in 1Thes.1:2-3 "We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

And because his work was a joy and not a burden, his ministry was profitable to them. That's not to say that there weren't trials during his time with them, but he could count on them to stand with him and honor him as the servant God had chosen for them.

And that's all any Pastor could ask of his flock. We've gone through trials together, but most of you have made it a joy for me and you have profited spiritually.

My feelings toward you are the same feelings Paul had towards these Thessalonians. Look at verse 7, "but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children."

The NAS say's "we proved to be gentle among you", again the idea that their actions spoke just as loud as their words. The metaphor Paul uses here is beautiful; "like a mother caring for her little children."

Or as other versions put it, "like a nursing mother who cares for her child." Paul sees the Thessalonians as in need of constant and loving care. And the picture Paul paints for us is that such a mother would do anything to protect her child and make sure he received the nourishment he needed.

This is the way Paul saw his role, as a nursing mother who just wants the best for her child. And so he continues in verse 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."

I can identify with Paul here because that's a love only God can give to a Pastor. Before Christ called me to this ministry I loved to teach His word to the flock and minister to them in any way I could with Calvary Chapel, Ft. Lauderdale and other churches I've been involved with over the last 18+ years.

But, when the Lord showed me some 9 or 10 years ago that He was preparing me for the Pastorate, I used to shudder to think that I would have to get involved with and be responsible for the lives of His flock in this particular way.

One of the things that kept me from actively pursuing the ministry at that time was that I wasn't sure I could love them as Christ would want me to at that time. And so rather than do it in the flesh I got involved in other ministries where I could serve in the Spirit and have different responsibilities which didn't involve the kind of ministering only a Pastor can do.

But, when the Lord called me here He gave me something that I could not have conjured up; a love so deep for Him that He gave

me the kind of love for you that I needed to give you my life, not just the gospel and His word.

And you have become very dear to me. And there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you to serve you, to equip you, to encourage you and to protect you.

But, I've done it all because I love you and only want your best that you might be the best for your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, so that together we might glorify Him in all that we do and in the process share in the furtherance of His Kingdom. That's what this is all about.

It has nothing to do with power plays, it has nothing to do with politics, it has nothing to do with personalities; it has everything to do with getting on with the work Christ has called us to.

We're about to enter into a new chapter as we take the ministry to the people and to meet the needs of those people who have all sorts of needs. There are Christians out there who have been spiritually beat up, who have been taught bad doctrine which has affected their walk with the Lord, and who have been taken advantage of.

This Calvary Chapel needs to be a refuge, a haven and a place where believers can grow, be encouraged and to be equipped for the work God has called them to, and you and I must be willing to meet those needs by loving the brethren in that way.

There are those people who don't know Christ. These people also have been looked down upon by the world and unfortunately in some cases by other Christians as well.

There are battered wives and children, women contemplating abortion, men and women who are struggling with life. This Calvary Chapel needs to be a refuge and have a love for them as well. But, in the process we need to direct the lost to the only refuge and haven who can solve their deepest problem.

That problem is sin and the wages of that sin is death. We're in a life and death battle. And make no mistake about it, it is a battle which our enemy, Satan, would love to win. But the victory is already ours in Christ. And for that reason we don't need to sheepishly cower in some corner. We have the message of hope and life eternal and this Calvary Chapel along with all of you need to understand that we have a job to do for God.

It's not something we do just on Sunday's or Tuesday's. It's the privilege to live and to honor our God every day of the week and to live in His power that we might serve in His power, so that when we're called upon we'll have a word of encouragement for a brother or sister, or even the lost. Or we'll be able to extend love to those who are hungry or need clothing or are in jail or need shelter.

However God calls us to serve and love it will done with the motivation of doing it for Jesus, because He did it all for us by dying for us even when we were His enemies.

In Christ we have been reconciled to the Father never to be separated from Him. Our world here in Port Charlotte, or Ft. Myers, or anywhere else we happen to be, needs to hear that message, but they also need to see that message in the way we appreciate what Christ has given us.

And part of what He's given to us is a like-mindedness where we have the same love, being one in the Spirit and purpose. This kind of unity must grow out of a Christ-like attitude.

I like what John MacArthur says about unity of the body of Christ. He say's, "Unity cannot be maintained in a static situation. Churches that struggle to achieve unity in and of itself, apart from a common goal, never acquire it. The only way to achieve unity is to be engaged in a common struggle to reach a common goal. That's because when everyone is focused on a common goal and desperate to win, no one cares about issues extraneous to obtaining victory."

Our victory is secure, but our goal must be the same as Christ's, which is to further His Kingdom with thanksgiving and love for so great a gift we have in Him.

Let me close with an encouragement from Paul found in the letter to the Romans.

ROM 12:1-5 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. 3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God

has given you. 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."