

In the first chapter Paul and his team praised the Thessalonians for their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in Jesus (1:3ⁱ). He reassured them of God choosing them by telling of how the Word of God came to them in power and the Holy Spirit and full conviction. He acknowledged how they imitated the faith of Paul and his companions with joy despite the persecution they were experiencing. It was a testimony that the surrounding regions had heard about. Their neighbors had heard how they turned from idols to the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven. We were encouraged to be the same kind of believers whose lives are a testimony and whose hope is in Jesus' return.

Chapter two is a reminder of the manner in which Paul and company ministered to them. We will see in these verses the way in which those who are called to lead set an example for the hearers to follow. When we teach, our behavior must exemplify what we are teaching. People learn more readily by an example than by a lecture. Put both together and you have a disciple maker, which is the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19,20ⁱⁱ. We are to make disciples of all nations. That is what Paul was doing in Thessalonica. He was not just making converts and expecting them to grow on their own. He sent Timothy to make sure they were staying true to the gospel and growing in their knowledge of the Lord and His Word. It is God's will that we share what Jesus has done for us, but when the seed falls on fertile ground, we need to water and care for it. This labor of love is called discipleship.

¹ For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. 1 Thessalonians 2:1,2 Paul begins by reminding them that their visit to the Thessalonica was not in vain. He already told them in chapter one of the fruit he saw in their lives. That was evidence that God had chosen them and was working in their hearts from the time he spent there up to the present.

Paul and Silas had been abused in their previous city, Philippi. They were caned, jailed, and put in stocks. They had responded to the pain and humiliation by singing praise to God. An earthquake had opened their stocks and the prison doors. That resulted in the jailor and his family being converted and a church starting in that city (See Acts 16.) If that kind of painful humiliation happened to most people, they would likely have PTSD and be wary of sharing the gospel in the next town. PTSD would even be more likely if they faced new conflict, which was the case in Thessalonica. *When Paul arrived in Thessalonica, the wounds on his back from Philippi were still fresh. If Paul was in it for himself, he wasn't very smart about serving his own self-interest.*ⁱⁱⁱ

The Greek word for conflict is *agoni*. It described an athlete in training or engaged with an opponent in an intensely strenuous effort. There were people who opposed Paul, but the spiritual battle was the main conflict. Instead of cowering and being fearful of opponents, they boldly declared the gospel of God with the courage that comes from the Holy Spirit. They preached the good news that Jesus has paid our sin debt and will cover us in His righteousness if we will turn away from our sinful ways and receive Him as our Lord (Acts 2:38^{iv}). He will make His home in us and guide our lives to be full of purpose

and lasting results. It is the greatest exchange: our sins for His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21^v).

Paul did not think that the abuse he suffered or the hard labor he endured was a punishment from God. He saw everything as a part of his ministry to Christ. At his ordination he was told how many things he would have to suffer for the sake of Christ (Acts 9:16^{vi}). But the suffering was not in vain. He trusted God to direct the events of his life for the glory of God. It was simple trust and acceptance of whatever came his way, knowing God is sovereign over the details of life. It is a lesson we all need to embrace.

³ *For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,*
⁴ *but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.* 1 Thessalonians 2:3,4 Paul used similar language in his letter to the Corinthians. ² *But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.* 2 Corinthians 4:2 There were philosophers and teachers who used smooth rhetoric to fleece groups of gullible people. Perhaps the Jews were trying to discredit Paul by claiming he had other motives. It happens in our day as well. I have seen it in churches. Why are there so many multi-millionaire TV evangelists? There is nothing wrong with acquiring wealth, unless it is done through cunning, deceit, and tampering with God's Word, such as we see with the prosperity gospel. "If you will give your seed money, God will multiply it," they say. They are playing on man's greed for wealth while making themselves rich in the process. Another tactic is telling you that God wants to break the spirit of poverty, so give what you have that He might bless you. It is all the same shameful manipulation of our desire to be spiritual but find security in wealth as well. The results are people disappointed in church and skeptical of any preaching. But the real problem is our own hearts. If we do not value God's Word enough to study it and discern truth from error, we set ourselves up for these conmen (Ephesians 4:14^{vii}; Hebrews 5:14^{viii}). Peter warned against such false teachers and predicted their outcome. ³ *And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.* 2 Peter 2:3

Paul and company had a clear conscience. They did not tell the Thessalonians words that would please them. They told them they were sinners who needed the salvation that only Jesus could provide. You do not hear that in many churches today because the leadership wants to grow a big church which means more prestige and higher salaries. There is a balance between not being intentionally offensive and at the same time making the truth clear, especially when it comes to issues that are not related to salvation. But **if people do not know we are sinners, they will not know we need a Savior** (Romans 6:23^{ix}). If they are unaware of our fallen nature, they will not see the need for a new nature. People are *not* naturally good; they are naturally evil (Psalm 14:3^x). Paul proclaimed that because he was entrusted with the gospel, he spoke in such a way as to please God. He described that in another letter as speech that is full of grace and seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:6^{xi}). We should not offend people but at the same time never compromise the truth of who Jesus is and what He has done for us (Matthew 18:7^{xii}).

⁵ *For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness.* 1 Thessalonians 2:5 As we learned in the previous message, Paul and his team worked to earn the income to pay for their food (2 Thessalonians 3:8^{xiii}).

They did not want to appear like others who took advantage of the generosity of their hearers. Most of all, they wanted nothing to get in the way of the Thessalonians hearing and receiving the gospel (Acts 20:33^{xiv}). That is why I only preach on tithing when we come across it in Scripture. I will tell you when we have a shortfall and leave it at that. We have not lacked in the 23 years since I have served here. If God is guiding, then He will surely provide. We just need to stay faithful to His Word. Jesus told us to give unto Caesar what belongs to Him and to God what belongs to God (Matthew 22:21^{xv}). If you love Jesus, obey him. Our excuses rob us of blessings.

Paul and his team gave up their right to be supported and worked with their hands so that no one could find an excuse to reject the gospel message claiming it was a scam made up by greedy people. I am sure you recognize there is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9^{xvi}). The heart of man never changes. There are tens of thousands of people in slave like conditions trying to scam people through email and the internet. People will always try to find a way to take from others what is not theirs. It is theft, plain and simple. *“Where greed and ambition hold sway, innumerable corruptions follow, and the whole man turns to vanity. These are the two sources from which stems the corruption of the whole of the ministry.” Calvin*

The fraudsters often use flattery or have a clever scam to mask their greed. Paul tells them that they know that he did not use those tactics. He may have been implying that they needed to refute his critics with the testimony of how Paul and his team lived among them. The letter began with genuine praise because they had already received the gospel and were growing in Christ. He is reminding them of how his way of life was an instruction as to how we as followers of Jesus should behave. He ends that defense by declaring that God is witness. That is the final appeal to truth. God knows all things. He knows Paul was selflessly proclaiming the gospel. What a pure feeling to know that your heart is right before God, that you are denying yourself for the sake of the gospel and the glory of God! This is the example we should follow. It was Jesus' example that Paul was following (1 Corinthians 11:1^{xvii}). May we always live in such a way that we can call on God as our witness.

^{6a} Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others,

1 Thessalonians 2:6a Paul's team did not want the Thessalonians to exalt him and his team or think they were uniquely wonderful. They knew they were sinners saved by grace as we all are (1 Timothy 1:15^{xviii}). They wanted all the glory to go to God. When we become people pleasers, it is because we want some of the glory to go to ourselves. It is the flesh wanting attention, the honor and respect of man. We want to be accepted and valued. The extreme of that desire is what caused Satan to fall (Isaiah 14:12-14^{xix}). He wanted to be worshiped. It is when we care more about what people think of us than God's glory. The more we know how corrupt our old nature is and how glorious our heavenly Father is, the more we will be careful to see God gets all the glory. In Isaiah 48:11^{xx} God declares He will not give His glory to another.

However, God does *share* His glory with those who suffer for Him (Romans 8:17^{xxi}). Through belief in the truth and the sanctification by the Spirit we share in the glory of Jesus (2 Thessalonians 2:14^{xxii}). That means that we exhibit the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23^{xxiii}).

Seeking the glory that comes from man is a very different glory compared to the glory that comes from God. The glory that comes from man sees the recipient as exalted

human being almost without flaws, a leader par excellence, without recognizing that the Lord is the source of that person's gifts. The world will worship the Antichrist and Lucifer who gave his power and authority to him (Revelation 13:4^{xxiv}). He will seem to be the ultimate man whose wisdom and guidance will solve mankind's problems. That is a role Lucifer craved. The result will be horrendous. Our old nature loves it when people praise us and look to us for answers. But it is the same spirit as that of the Antichrist if the glory does not go to God. That is why we sometimes see religious leaders who become successful in the world's eyes end up compromising their faith. The praise of man seduces the soul.

The glory God shares with us is His glorious nature. That causes us to humble ourselves and recognize when we exhibit His likeness in the fruits of the Spirit that it is the grace of God manifest through us redeemed sinners. I think the wisdom of God was manifest in choosing Saul who became Paul, a humble broken former persecutor of the body of Christ (Ephesians 3:8^{xxv}). No wonder he understood it was wrong to seek glory from people. He knew the depravity and ignorance of his old nature.

^{6b} though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 2:6b In the role of apostle, Paul could have made demands. He could have demanded that they listen to His words and respect them as the very words of God. He could have insisted they support and honor him because it would be honoring the Lord who sent him (1 Corinthians 9:4-11^{xxvi}). He could have insisted on staying in the nicest residence for to do so would be to honor Christ who sent him. But Paul knew it would have put a stumbling block before them (1 Corinthians 8:9^{xxvii}). The unbeliever could then claim Paul only served God for his personal gain. It would also have set a bad example for any of the Thessalonians who might become elders.

Jesus' example of leadership was to be the servant of all (Luke 22:27^{xxviii}). The servant of all is the one who demonstrates the glory of God by showing grace. Paul knew what Jesus' taught whether he heard it from the other apostles or from the Spirit. *²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus exemplified servant leadership. Godly leaders will do likewise.

⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. 1 Thessalonians 2:7 Instead of lording their authority over the new Thessalonian believers, they were gentle among them. After all, they were babes in this new life. They needed to learn to walk. They needed to learn that correction is for their good. Just as babies need patient, gentle care, so these new believers and all new believers need patient, loving, gracious care. We should not be surprised when they stumble. That is a natural part of growing up. We patiently lift them to their feet and encourage them to try again. When they cry for the milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2^{xxix}), we should patiently give it to them as we teach them to hold the Bible bottle all by themselves. We demonstrate the same grace God demonstrated with us.

Our younger believers who came to Christ during COVID had lots of New Age ideas they wanted to combine with their new faith. I would respectfully listen and then gently share what the Bible said about the topic. As they grew in the knowledge of the

Word, and guests came to Jesus in the House, they wanted to interrupt them when the person started trying to say the same things they said when they first believed. They forgot that we were patient with them like a mother with her own children. It is the truth that sets us free. But if we are offensive and they leave, they won't hear the truth.

⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 This is discipleship the Jesus' way. Our heart goes out to the new believer. This is a necessary attribute of the one who disciples. He or she must have genuine love and care for the new believers. We know the roaring lion will try to turn the sheep back to their old life or to some distorted belief (1 Peter 5:8^{xxx}). So, we make the time to share the sincere milk of the Word with them to ground them in the faith. We make sure they understand what Jesus has done for them and their access to the Father in prayer (Hebrews 4:16^{xxxi}).

But it does not stop there. We must be ready to give them our time, our testimonies of our failures and victories, our very selves because they become so dear to us. My spirit grieves when a young new believer stops attending. We recently learned how important it is to get contact information for new people who attend so that we can follow up with them and show them we truly care. It is not just to add another member to the congregation, so our church is bigger. It is because they are made in the image of God. They have enormous potential in Christ. They may not have really come all the way to faith. And if that is the case, their eternal destiny hangs in the balance (John 3:36^{xxxii}).

Jesus did not spend personal time with everyone. But he did spend three years teaching His disciples. His command is for us to make disciples (Matthew 28:19^{xxxiii}). That means investing in a few individuals, teaching them to feed themselves with the Word, encouraging them to find their calling, praying for them for the rest of our life. It may include your children and grandchildren. It may be a neighbor. It may be a new believer at your church whom God puts on your heart.

My experience is that many potential disciples will not want to get serious about following Jesus and go their own way. In that case, we must entrust them to the Great Shepherd's care. Others will grow to a point and move on. Others will remain friends for life, but they are the exception. We do our part as a gentle, patient, parent and trust God for the rest. Let us be about our Lord's business for his glory, and his alone.

Questions:

- 1 What happened in Philippi?
- 2 From Paul's defense what can we assume the accusations against him were?
- 3 How does his defense warn us?
- 4 Why is greed and corruption so pervasive?
- 5 Can you call on God as the One who witnesses your professed testimony?
- 6 What is the difference between the glory that comes from man and the glory God shares with us?
- 7 Why did Paul not assert his rights?
- 8 How did Paul treat the Thessalonians and what should we take from that?
- 9 To what extent was Paul willing to share? How about you?
- 10 How important is discipleship? What can you do about it?

ⁱ **1 Thessalonians 1:3 (ESV)**

³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

ⁱⁱ **Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

ⁱⁱⁱ David Guzik, *1 Thessalonians*, David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), 1 Th 2:1–2.

^{iv} **Acts 2:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

^v **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{vi} **Acts 9:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

^{vii} **Ephesians 4:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

^{viii} **Hebrews 5:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

^{ix} **Romans 6:23 (ESV)**

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

^x **Psalms 14:3 (ESV)**

³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

^{xi} **Colossians 4:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

^{xii} **Matthew 18:7 (ESV)**

⁷ “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!

^{xiii} **2 Thessalonians 3:8 (ESV)**

⁸ nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.

^{xiv} **Acts 20:33 (ESV)**

³³ I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel.

^{xv} **Matthew 22:21 (ESV)**

²¹ They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

^{xvi} **Ecclesiastes 1:9 (ESV)**

⁹ What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

^{xvii} **1 Corinthians 11:1 (ESV)**

¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

^{xviii} **1 Timothy 1:15 (KJV)**

¹⁵ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

^{xix} **Isaiah 14:12-14 (ESV)**

¹² “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! ¹³ You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’

^{xx} **Isaiah 48:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

^{xxi} **Romans 8:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

^{xxii} **2 Thessalonians 2:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

^{xxiii} **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

^{xxiv} **Revelation 13:4 (ESV)**

⁴ And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?”

^{xxv} **Ephesians 3:8 (ESV)**

⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

^{xxvi} **1 Corinthians 9:4-11 (ESV)**

⁴ Do we not have the right to eat and drink? ⁵ Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? ⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? ⁸ Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

^{xxvii} **1 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV)**

⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

^{xxviii} **Luke 22:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

^{xxix} **1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)**

² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—

^{xxx} **1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

^{xxxi} **Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

^{xxxii} **John 3:36 (ESV)**

³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

^{xxxiii} **Matthew 28:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,