

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter the apostle puts the Thessalonians in mind of the manner of his preaching among them (v. 1-6). Then of the manner of his conversation among them (v. 7-12). Afterwards of the success of his ministry, with the effects both on himself and on them (v. 13-16), and then apologizes for his absence (v. 17-20).

SIN 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-6

THE PRIMITIVE MINISTERS

Here we have an account of Paul's manner of preaching, and his comfortable reflection upon his entrance in among the Thessalonians. As he had the testimony of his own conscience witnessing to his integrity, so he could appeal to the Thessalonians how faithful he, and Silas, and Timotheus, his helpers in the work of the Lord, had discharged their office: *You yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you.* Note, It is a great comfort to a minister to have his own conscience and the consciences of others witnessing for him that he set out well, with good designs and from good principles; and that *his preaching was not in vain*, or, as some read it, *was not fain*. The apostle here comforts himself either in the success of his ministry, that it was not fruitless or in vain (according to our translation), or as others think, reflecting upon the sincerity of his preaching, that it was not vain and empty, or deceitful and treacherous. The subject-matter of the apostle's preaching was not vain and idle speculations about useless niceties and foolish questions, but sound and solid truth, such as was most likely to profit his hearers. A good example this is, to be imitated by all the ministers of the gospel. Much less was the apostle's preaching vain or deceitful. He could say to these Thessalonians what he told the Corinthians (GOOD 2 Corinthians 4:2): *We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.* He had no sinister or worldly design in his preaching, which he puts them in mind to have been,

I. With courage and resolution: *We were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God*, v. 2. The apostle was inspired with a holy boldness, nor was he discouraged at the afflictions he met with, or the opposition that was made against him. He had met with ill usage at Philippi, as these Thessalonians well knew. There it was that he and Silas were shamefully treated, being put in the stocks; yet no sooner were they set at liberty than they went to Thessalonica, and preached the gospel with as much boldness as ever. Note, Suffering in a good cause should rather sharpen than blunt the edge of holy resolution. The gospel of Christ, at its first setting out in the world, met with much opposition; and those who preached it preached it *with contention*, with great agony, which denoted either the apostles' striving in their preaching or their striving against the opposition they met with. This was Paul's comfort; he was neither daunted in his work, nor driven from it.

II. With great simplicity and godly sincerity: *Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile*, v. 3. This, no doubt, was matter of the greatest comfort to the apostle — the consciousness of his own sincerity; and was one reason of his success. It was the sincere and uncorrupted gospel that he preached and exhorted them to believe and obey. His design was not to set up a faction, to draw men over to a party, but to promote *pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father*. The gospel he preached was without deceit, it was true and faithful; it was not fallacious, nor a cunningly-devised fable. Nor was it of uncleanness. His gospel was pure and holy, worthy of its holy author, tending to discountenance all manner of impurity. *The word of God is pure*. There should be no corrupt mixtures therewith; and, as the matter of the apostle's exhortation was thus true and pure, the manner of his speaking was without guile. He did not pretend one thing and intend another. *He believed, and therefore he spoke*. He had no sinister and secular aims and views, but was in reality what he seemed to be. The apostle not only asserts his sincerity, but subjoins the reasons and evidences thereof. The reasons are contained, v. 4.

1. They were stewards, *put in trust* with the gospel: and it is required of a steward that he be faithful. The gospel which Paul preached was not his own, but the gospel of God. Note, Ministers have a great favour shown them, and honour put upon them, and trust committed to them. They must not dare to corrupt the word of God: they must diligently make use of

what is entrusted with them, so as God hath allowed and commanded, knowing they shall be called to an account, when they must be no longer stewards.

2. Their design was to please God and not men. God is a God of truth, and requires truth in the inward parts; and, if sincerity be wanting, all that we do cannot please God. The gospel of Christ is not accommodated to the fain fancies and lusts of men, to gratify their appetites and passions; but, on the contrary, it was designed for the mortifying of their corrupt affections, and delivering them from the power of fancy, that they might be brought under the power of faith. *If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ,* ^{<810>}Galatians 1:10.

3. They acted under the consideration of God's omniscience, as in the sight of him who *tries our hearts*. This is indeed the great motive to sincerity, to consider that God not only seeth all that we do, but knoweth our thoughts afar off, and searcheth the heart. He is well acquainted with all our aims and designs, as well as our actions. And it is from this God who trieth our hearts that we must receive our reward. The evidences of the apostle's sincerity follow; and they are these: —

(1.) He avoided flattery: *Neither at any time used we flattering words, as you know,* v. 5. He and his fellow-labourers preached Christ and him crucified, and did not aim to gain an interest in men's affections for themselves, by glorying, and fawning and wheedling them. No, he was far from this; nor did he flatter men in their sins; nor tell them, if they would be of his party, they might live as they listed. He did not flatter them with fain hopes, nor indulge them in any evil work or way, promising them life, and so *daubing with untempered mortar*.

(2.) He avoided covetousness. He did not make the ministry *a cloak*, or a covering, for *covetousness, as God was witness,* v. 5. His design was not to enrich himself by preaching the gospel; so far from this, he did not stipulate with them for bread. He was not like the false apostles, who, *through covetousness, with feigned words made merchandise* of the people, ^{<818>}2 Peter 2:3.

(3.) He avoided ambition and vain-glory: *Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you nor yet of others,* v. 6. They expected neither people's purses nor their caps, neither to be enriched by them nor caressed, and adored, and called Rabbi by them. This apostle exhorts the Galatians

(~~485~~ Galatians 5:26) *not to be desirous of vain glory*; his ambition was to obtain *that honour which comes from God*, (~~484~~ John 5:44). He tells them that they might have used greater authority as apostles, and expected greater esteem, and demanded maintenance, which is meant by the phrase of *being burdensome*, because perhaps some would have thought this too great a burden for them to bear.

~~501~~ 1 THESSALONIANS 2:7-12

THE PRIMITIVE MINISTERS

In these words the apostle reminds the Thessalonians of the manner of his conversation among them. And,

I. He mentions the gentleness of their behaviour: *We were gentle among you*, v. 7. He showed great mildness and tenderness who might have acted with the authority of an apostle of Christ. Such behaviour greatly recommends religion, and is most agreeable to God's gracious dealing with sinners, in and by the gospel. This great apostle, though he abhorred and avoided flattery, was most condescending to all men. He accommodated himself to all men's capacities, *and became all things to all men*. He showed the kindness and care of a nurse that cherishes her children. This is the way to win people, rather than to rule with rigour. The word of God is indeed powerful; and as it comes often with awful authority upon the minds of men, as it always has enough in it to convince every impartial judgment, so it comes with the more pleasing power, when the ministers of the gospel recommend themselves to the affections of the people. And as a nursing mother bears with frowardness in a child, and condescends to mean offices for its good, and draws out her breast, cherishing it in her bosom, so in like manner should the ministers of Christ behave towards their people. *The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, and patient*, (~~502~~ 2 Timothy 2:24). This gentleness and goodness the apostle expressed several ways.

1. By the most affectionate desire of their welfare: *Being affectionately desirous of you*, v. 8. The apostle had a most affectionate love to their persons, and sought them, not theirs; themselves, not their goods; and to gain them, not to be a gainer by them, or to make a merchandise of them:

it was their spiritual and eternal welfare and salvation that he was earnestly desirous of.

2. By great readiness to do them good, willingly imparting to them, *not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls*, v. 8. See here the manner of Paul's preaching. He spared no pains therein. He was willing to run hazards, and venture his soul, or life, in preaching the gospel. He was willing to spend and be spent in the service of men's souls; and, as those who give bread to the hungry from a charitable principle are said to impart their souls in what they give (²⁸¹Isaiah 18:10), so did the apostles in giving forth the bread of life; so dear were these Thessalonians in particular to this apostle, and so great was his love to them.

3. By bodily labour to prevent their charge, or that his ministry might not be expensive and burdensome to them: *You remember our labour and travail; for, labouring night and day*, etc., v. 9. He denied himself the liberty he had of taking wages from the churches. To the labour of the ministry he added that of his calling, as a tent-maker, that he might get his own bread. We are not to suppose that the apostle spent the whole night and day in bodily labour, or work, to supply the necessities of his body; for then he would have had no time for the work of the ministry. But he spent part of the night, as well as the day, in this work; and was willing to forego his rest in the night, that he might have an opportunity to do good to the souls of men in the day time. A good example is here set before the ministers of the gospel, to be industrious for the salvation of men's souls, though it will not follow that they are always obliged to preach freely. There is no general rule to be drawn from this instance, either that ministers may at no time work with their hands, for the supply of their outward necessities, or that they ought always to do so.

4. By the holiness of their conversation, concerning which he appeals not only to them, but to God also (v. 10): *You are witnesses, and God also*. They were observers of their outward conversation in public before men, and God was witness not only of their behaviour in secret, but of the inward principles from which they acted. Their behaviour was holy towards God, just towards all men, and unblamable, without giving cause of scandal or offence; and they were careful to give no offence either to those who were without, or to those who believed, that they might give no ill example; that their preaching and living might be all of a piece. Herein,

said this apostle, *do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men,* ^{<4216>} Acts 24:16.

II. He mentions their faithful discharge of the work and office of the ministry, v. 11, 12. Concerning this also he could appeal to them as witnesses. Paul and his fellow-labourers were not only good Christians, but faithful ministers. And we should not only be good as to our general calling as Christians, but in our particular callings and relations. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians, not only informing them in their duty, but exciting and quickening them to the performance of it, by proper motives and arguments. And he comforted them also, endeavouring to cheer and support their spirits under the difficulties and discouragements they might meet with. And this he did not only publicly, but privately also, and from house to house (^{<4217>} Acts 20:20), *and charged every one* of them by personal addresses: this, some think, is intended by the similitude of a father's charging his children. This expression also denotes the affectionate and compassionate counsels and consolations which this apostle used. He was their spiritual father; and, as he cherished them like a nursing mother, so he charged them as a father, with a father's affection rather than a father's authority. *As my beloved sons, I warn you,* ^{<4218>} 1 Corinthians 4:14. The manner of this apostle's exhortation ought to be regarded by ministers in particular for their imitation, and the matter of it is greatly to be regarded by them and all others; namely, that *they would walk worthy of God, who hath called them to his kingdom and glory*, v. 12. Observe,

- 1.** What is our great gospel privilege — that God has called us to his kingdom and glory. The gospel calls us into the kingdom and state of grace here and unto the kingdom and state of glory hereafter, to heaven and happiness as our end and to holiness as the way to that end.
- 2.** What is our great gospel duty — that we walk worthy of God, that the temper of our minds and tenour of our lives be answerable to this call and suitable to this privilege. We should accommodate ourselves to the intention and design of the gospel, and live suitably to our profession and privileges, our hopes and expectations, as becomes those who are called with such a high and holy calling.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13-16

EFFECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

Here observe,

I. The apostle makes mention of the success of his ministry among these Thessalonians (v. 13), which is expressed,

1. By the manner of their receiving the word of God: *When you received the word of God, which you heard of us, you received it, not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God.* Where note,

(1.) The word of the gospel is preached by men like ourselves, men of like passions and infirmities with others: *We have this treasure in earthen vessels.* The word of God, which these Thessalonians received, they heard from the apostles.

(2.) However, it is in truth the word of God. Such was the word the apostles preached by divine inspiration, and such is that which is left upon record, written in the scriptures by divine inspiration; and such is that word which in our days is preached, being either contained, or evidently founded on, or deduced from, these sacred oracles.

(3.) Those are greatly to blame who give out their own fancies or injunctions for the word of God. This is the vilest way of imposing upon a people, and to deal unfaithfully.

(4.) Those are also to blame who, in hearing the word, look no further than to the ministry of men, who are only, or chiefly, pleased with the elegance of the style, or the beauty of the composition, or the voice and manner in which the word is preached, and expect to receive their advantage herein.

(5.) We should receive the word of God as the word of God, with affections suitable to the holiness, wisdom, verity, and goodness, thereof. The words of men are frail and perishing, like themselves, and sometimes false, foolish, and fickle: but God's word is holy, wise, just, and faithful; and, like its author, lives and abides for ever. Let us accordingly receive and regard it.

2. By the wonderful operation of this word they received: *It effectually worketh in those that believe,* v. 13. Those who by faith receive the word

find it profitable. *It does good to those that walk uprightly*, and by its wonderful effects evidences itself to be the word of God. This converts their souls, and enlightens their minds, and rejoices their hearts (Psalm 19); and such as have this inward testimony of the truth of the scriptures, the word of God, by the effectual operations thereof on their hearts, have the best evidence of their divine original to themselves, though this is not sufficient to convince others who are strangers thereto.

II. He mentions the good effects which his successful preaching had,

1. Upon himself and fellow-labourers. It was a constant cause of thankfulness: *For this cause thank we God without ceasing*, v. 13. The apostle expressed his thankfulness to God so often upon this account that he seemed to think he never could be sufficiently thankful that God had counted him faithful, and put him into the ministry, and made his ministrations successful.

2. Upon them. The word wrought effectually in them, not only to be examples unto others in faith and good works (which he had mentioned before), but also in constancy and patience under sufferings and trials for the sake of the gospel: *You became followers of the churches of God, and have suffered like things as they have done* (v. 14), and with like courage and constancy, with like patience and hope. Note, The cross is the Christian's mark: if we are called to suffer we are called only to be followers of the churches of God; *so persecuted they the prophets that were before you*, ^{<416>}Matthew 5:12. It is a good effect of the gospel when we are enabled to suffer for its sake. The apostle mentions the sufferings of the churches of God, which *in Judea were in Christ Jesus*. Those in Judea first heard the gospel, and they first suffered for it: for the Jews were the most bitter enemies Christianity had, and were especially enraged against their countrymen who embraced Christianity. Note, Bitter zeal and fiery persecution will set countrymen at variance, and break through all the bonds of nature, as well as contradict all the rules of religion. In every city where the apostles went to preach the gospel the Jews stirred up the inhabitants against them. They were the ringleaders of persecution in all places; so in particular it was at Thessalonica: ^{<417>}Acts 17:5, *The Jews that believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar*. Upon this occasion, the apostle gives a character of the unbelieving Jews

(v. 15), enough to justify their final rejection and the ruin of their place, and church, and nation, which was now approaching.

(1.) They *killed the Lord Jesus*, and impudently and presumptuously wished that his blood might be on them and their children.

(2.) They killed *their own prophets*: so they had done all along; their fathers had done so: they had been a persecuting generation.

(3.) They hated the apostles, and did them all the mischief they could. They persecuted them, and drove and chased them from place to place: and no marvel, if they killed the Lord Jesus, that they persecuted his followers.

(4.) They *pleased not God*. They had quite lost all sense of religion, and due care to do their duty to God. It was a most fatal mistake to think that they did God service by killing God's servants. Murder and persecution are most hateful to God and cannot be justified on any pretence; they are so contrary to natural religion that no zeal for any true or only pretended institution of religion can ever excuse them.

(5.) They were *contrary to all men*. Their persecuting spirit was a perverse spirit; contrary to the light of nature, and contrary to humanity, contrary to the welfare of all men, and contrary to the sentiments of all men not under the power of bigotry.

(6.) They had *an implacable enmity to the Gentiles*, and envied them the offers of the gospel: *Forbidding the apostles to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved*. The means of salvation had long been confined to the Jews. *Salvation is of the Jews*, says our Saviour. And they were envious against the Gentiles, and angry that they should be admitted to share in the means of salvation. Nothing provoked them more than our Saviour's speaking to them at any time concerning this matter; this enraged the Jews at Jerusalem, when, in his defence, Paul told them, *he was sent unto the Gentiles*, ⁴⁰²²Acts 22:21. They heard him patiently till he uttered these words, but then could endure no longer, but *lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live*. Thus did the Jews fill up their sins; and nothing tends more to any person or people's filling up the measure of their sins than opposing the gospel, obstructing the progress of it, and hindering the salvation of precious souls. For the sake of these things *wrath has come upon them to*

the uttermost; that is, wrath was determined against them, and would soon overtake them. It was not many years after this that Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Jewish nation cut off by the Romans. Note, When the measure of any man's iniquity is full, and he has sinned to the uttermost, then comes wrath, and that to the uttermost.

~~517~~ 1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-20

EFFECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

In these words the apostle apologizes for his absence. Here observe,

- 1.** He tells them they were involuntarily forced from them: *We, brethren, were taken from you*, v. 17. Such was the rage of his persecutors. He was unwillingly sent away by night to Berea, ~~447D~~ Acts 17:10.
- 2.** Though he was absent in body, yet he was present in heart. He had still a remembrance of them, and great care for them.
- 3.** Even his bodily absence was but for a short time, the time of an hour. Time is short, all our time on earth is short and uncertain, whether we are present with our friends or absent from them. This world is not a place where we are always, or long, to be together. It is in heaven that holy souls shall meet, and never part more.
- 4.** He earnestly desired and endeavoured to see them again: *We endeavoured more abundantly to see your face with great desire*, v. 17. So that the apostle at least intended his absence should be but for a short time. His desire and endeavour were to return again very soon to Thessalonica. But men of business are not masters of their own time. Paul did his endeavour, and he could do no more, v. 18.
- 5.** He tells them that Satan hindered his return (v. 18), that is, either some enemy or enemies, or the great enemy of mankind, who stirred up opposition to Paul, either in his return to Thessalonica, when he intended to return thither, or stirred up such contentions or dissensions in those places whether he went as made his presence necessary. Note, Satan is a constant enemy to the work of God, and does all he can to obstruct it.

6. He assures them of his affection and high esteem for them, though he was not able, as yet, to be present with them according to his desire. They were his *hope, and joy, and crown of rejoicing; his glory and joy*. These are expressions of great and endeared affection, and high estimation. And it is happy when ministers and people have such mutual affection and esteem of each other, and especially if they shall thus rejoice, if those that sow and those that reap shall rejoice together, *in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming*.

The apostle here puts the Thessalonians in mind that though he could not come to them as yet, and though he should never be able to come to them, yet our Lord Jesus Christ will come, nothing shall hinder this. And further, when he shall come, all must appear in his presence, or before him.

Ministers and people must all appear before him, and faithful people will be the glory and joy of faithful ministers in that great and glorious day.