

Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Series*) for **June 13, 2010**, is from **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the Bible Lesson Commentary. These are my preliminary verse by verse study notes before writing my Bible Lesson for *The Oklahoman* newspaper. They may help you in your class preparation and discussion. I do encourage you to write your own verse by verse notes and questions before reading the notes and questions below.

1 You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain,

Results that are "in vain" would lead us to say, "well, that didn't do any good." The results of Paul's visit to Thessalonica led to so much good, with lasting results, that where ever Paul traveled the good news about the Thessalonica church was reported to him.

2 but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition.

Paul never considered his mistreatment at the hands of others a sign that his ministry was a failure. He knew from what Jesus had said and from the suffering of the other apostles that suffering for teaching the gospel was to be expected. Still, it took great courage for Paul to continue preaching in the face of opposition and suffering much pain.

3 For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery,

Our motive for all we do should be love for God and love for others, seeking the highest well-being for all concerned. Love motivated Paul and the apostles. They were not preaching the gospel for personal gain or using false means in their ministry to achieve success or popularity.

4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts.

Jesus called Paul to serve him as an apostle, and God approved of the means and the message Paul used and taught. Paul's conscience commended him and he knew his heart was right before God. He did not preach from selfishness or to please the crowds in order to receive praise from people. Love for God and pleasing God by what he did and said was his intention: God saw that was Paul's motive was right from testing Paul's heart in various ways.

5 As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed;

Paul knew how some traveling philosophers, called Sophists, entertainers, and religious teachers achieved their goals. They "flattered" people by saying good things about them that they knew were exaggerated or perhaps not even true. They did this because they wanted something from someone.

6 nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others,

Seeking praise for what we do can lead to compromising the gospel or our values. Praise and profit motives can lead a teacher to omit teaching important truths they think will not be popular with the crowds.

7 though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.

As apostles of Christ, they could have demanded honor, places of prestige, money, or gifts from those who came to believe in Christ in Thessalonica. But they did not misuse the position of responsibility that God had called them to. They saw themselves as servants, as tender nurses who would care for their very own children in very special ways.

8 So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

The apostle Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy did not position themselves untouchably above the people in places of high honor. They did not demand that the people serve them because they were special as apostles. Instead, they served the people personally and became personally involved in their lives and daily concerns. As they learned about the deepest concerns and longings of the new believers, they became very dear to one another.

9 You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

Paul worked as a tent maker. He did not depend on the gifts and contributions of his new converts or the church to meet his needs. He did not want financial needs or wants to come between him and those he taught the gospel in order to lead them to faith in Jesus Christ.

10 You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers.

These are goals that every Christian leader should strive to attain. Purity includes high moral standards in every relationship with men and women. They obeyed the 10 Commandments from the heart, from love, as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. They did nothing blameworthy; although they did suffer for doing what was right and required by God.

11 As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children,

A nurse, with the intelligent skills of a nurse treating his or her very own children, indicates a high level of expertise as well as compassion. In addition, they cared for their new converts as a loving father would care for his very own children. They showed concern for the whole person, not just their intellectual or spiritual development, as important as that was.

12 urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

One of the greatest needs we face in the church today as believers, as those who call themselves Christians, is actually living with high moral standards as the Christians lived in the New Testament times. Still, living up to the standards of Jesus Christ takes effort and desire to overcome temptations and sin -- even in the power of the Holy Spirit. We know how wonderful our heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, are, so we need to live in ways that honor them, in ways that are worthy of being called "Christian," in ways that demonstrate our true love for God.

Questions for Discussion

1. Today, how difficult is it to discern the true motives of someone who preaches or teaches Christianity, either inside the church or outside the church? What are some tests that might reveal someone's true intentions? Why is Paul concerned to reveal his true motives to the Christians in Thessalonica? Why are motives or intentions for what we do important?
2. Why did Paul not want to burden new Christians with the need to meet his material needs? In what ways can concern for money be a stumbling block for some inside the church and outside the church, for believers and unbelievers who hear the gospel?
3. In what ways is "position" in the church important to people today? In what ways can people in high positions in the church abuse their status? How can believers avoid being abused by those in positions of power in a church?

4. How do we measure “success” in the church today? How would you discuss the true measure of success with someone who argued that suffering or mistreatment as a result of preaching is a sign that God is not blessing the teaching of the one suffering?

5. What is the practical and spiritual difference between serving God to please God and serving God to please people? Do you think anyone actually serves God today with the intention of pleasing people? How might this happen to someone almost without their knowing that they are really only seeking to please people instead of God?

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