

## 1 Thessalonians 2 (6-9) – You Can Be a Blessing

A nursing mother will do whatever it takes to care for her child. She will be attentive, gentle, helpful, and loving. Her child is dependent on her, and she will not be a burden for that child, she will be a blessing. The Apostle Paul uses that example to teach you how to become a blessing to other people.

The first thing Paul says in vs.6 is that he was in the ministry to give, not to take. *Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others* – Paul wasn't looking to be praised by the Thessalonians. Imagine a mother expecting her child's first words to be, "Thanks for changing my diaper, mom." Instead, a good mother knows she will be doing all sorts of things that no one else will even notice, and that the child doesn't yet understand. Motherhood and ministry are similar, in that while they can be a most joyful experience, they can also humble you with tedium, toil, and trouble. Paul was humble as he sought the glory that only God can bestow.

*though we could have made demands* – As an Apostle, Paul had been given a divine authority. He says that he could have legitimately asserted that authority. But he did not forcefully assert that authority or use his authority to manipulate people. Paul used his authority to build people up, not to lord it over them. He said the same thing to the church in Corinth. 2 Corinthians 1:24 says – *Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.* 2 Corinthians 13:10 says – *For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.* Paul was giving an example. He was in this to please God, spread God's kingdom, and help God's people.

**Vs.7-8** – Paul is describing the method and manner of his ministry. He wasn't demanding (vs.6), he was gentle, and caring. He pictures this as a nursing mother with her children. Paul had given them gospel words with a loving heart. And his love for them had increased as time went on. So much so that he says he was ready to give anything and everything for their benefit.

Paul goes on in vs.11 to speak of his manner and method being like a father. And vs.12 says he *exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God*. This is important to realize. Believers should be expected to mature in the faith. Paul treated the Thessalonians like a nursing mother with a child, being gentle with them. But he also treated them like a father who insists that his children grow up, live right, and move forward. Babies need almost constant attention. That's the way it is. But babies are meant to grow out of that. That's the way it should be.

By using both the mother and father pictures, Paul was saying that the Thessalonians were family to him. He knew his role, and he acted properly. He was a blessing. And he is giving you an example of the love you're to have for others. And teaching how you can be a blessing to others.

**Vs.9** – The word “for” transitions you from the analogy of vs.7-8 into the application of vs.9. Paul is commenting on his previous metaphor, and describing exactly how he was like a nursing mother with them. He was working for their benefit. Not working them over for his benefit.

Paul was defending himself to people who already believed him. Why? So that they could defend him to people who didn't believe him. And so that they could defend themselves to people who didn't believe them. Because people want to discredit the message by discrediting the messengers. So, Paul wasn't simply defending himself for his own sake. He was defending himself for their sake, and the gospel's sake.

Paul wanted these new believers to be disciples who could disciple others. And he points to his own life as an example for all disciples to follow. Every Christian is a disciple. And every Christian is to be involved in the process of making other disciples. This means living your life with an intent to help others to be more like Christ, in their thoughts, words, and deeds. And to demonstrate how to do this while suffering pain, problems, persecution, and slander. You live out what you say you believe in. You live like Jesus is worth it. Paul was living it out so as to teach them how to live it out.

Paul is defending himself against critics who were attacking his motives. Previously, when Paul was actually *in* Thessalonica, the unbelieving Jews provoked a riot by claiming that Paul and Silas were supporting another king besides Caesar. And they stormed the house of Jason, a new believer, trying to find Paul. When they couldn't find him, they dragged Jason before the city authorities, accusing him of harboring a man who was proclaiming another king than Caesar. The people of Thessalonica got worked up over this because they knew that if Rome heard they were supporting a new king, Rome would act, and Thessalonica would lose its free status. So, Jason had to post a bond, a monetary pledge, and if Paul and Silas came back, Jason would be financially ruined (Acts 17:5-9).

So, that tactic worked. Paul stayed out of Thessalonica. But the church kept on growing, in number and influence. So, these critics turned Paul and Silas' forced departure into another weapon against Paul and the gospel. They claimed that Paul was a religious charlatan who ran away when he was exposed as a fraud. They said he was using religion as a cover to get money, seduce women, and gain power over the people. And now that he had been found out, the scoundrel had moved on to the next town.

Of course, these claims were not true. And the Thessalonians knew that, and they were not going to be persuaded by these slanderous accusations. Still, Paul addressed these false claims. Why? Because the Thessalonians were evangelizing, and witnessing, and part of that involves addressing the arguments people use to ignore or deny the gospel message. That includes the lies people spread about the message because of the messengers.

Paul wasn't a charlatan. But even when a messenger is a charlatan, it doesn't mean that the true gospel message isn't true. A lot of people will use "being taken advantage of" or "being burned" by false messengers as an excuse to defy God and deny the gospel. And people will use their bad experience to indict and inflict the entire church. Of course, with all the bad messages, bad messengers, and bad experiences out there, it is understandable why so many are suspicious and dismissive. But that proves why it is so important

to point out the charlatans and live with integrity. Paul wasn't a charlatan. He had the right message, the right methods, and the right motives. And he wanted to remind the Thessalonians of his consistent conduct, because living the difference demonstrates the difference. You live like a blessing.

Paul knew that his critics were trying to undermine his integrity, in order to undermine the gospel message. So, Paul has been defending his motives, not simply to look good to the Thessalonians, but to be an example to the Thessalonians of how to stop such slander from undermining the gospel message. Not just slander about him, but slander about them.

It is unfortunate, but understandable, when bad actors and bad doctrine lead people to think Christianity is a bad message. So, the Thessalonians needed to know how Paul maintained and defended his integrity, so that they would know how to maintain and defend their integrity. But this is not some foolproof way to bring people to the faith. Those who remain enemies of the gospel will remain unconvinced. But those who God is calling to himself will be helped by seeing who the hypocrites really are.

You won't be perfect. But you can be consistent. Paul's consistent message, methods, and motives were known by the Thessalonians. He wanted them to be known for that, too. God wants you to be known in this way also. You increase your integrity by maintaining consistency. This consistency doesn't mean that you never change, stubbornly clinging to falsehood. The false messages and false messengers may be very consistent in that way. Rather, the consistency Paul is talking about is that pleasing God is your highest goal, and you are consistently guarding your heart against error, impurity, and deception, as you consistently expose your heart to God (vs.3-4). And you learn to root out flattery, greed, and self-glory in your life (vs.5-6). So, you stop acting like a fool. And you stop following fools. And your life becomes a witness that helps others avoid trouble. This is what Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:15-16 – *Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

The Apostle Paul had enemies. These enemies were actually the enemies of the gospel and its message. This message upset the power and privilege structures of Paul's day. Especially when it came to the realm of religion. So, the enemies of the gospel, and especially the religious establishment, would attack both the message and the messengers. But Paul proved his integrity as he clung to Christ in controversy, conflict, and catastrophe. He was like a mother, working, laboring night and day, providing for her children so that she is not a burden for them, but a blessing to them.

Of course, when a minister turns out to be an obvious charlatan, it reflects badly on the gospel. And it emboldens people to attack the message and discredit its ministers. So, since people were spreading lies about Paul, he mentions his ongoing occupational work as a tentmaker (Acts 18:1-3). He did this so that he didn't have to take any support from the Thessalonians while he was planting and helping to establish the church there. Paul knew that his enemies would say that he was just using religion as a way to make money off of people. So, Paul worked to support himself financially in order to prove that this wasn't the case. He could point to this fact when others said he was just going from town to town, trying to scam people.

Paul also made tents while he was ministering in Ephesus (Acts 20:34-35). He also did this among the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 4:12). However, this was not Paul saying that it is wrong for a minister to receive money for working in the ministry. Rather, this was what Paul did when it fit the occasion. And this isn't a rule for every minister to follow in every situation. Especially if that person is to stay in a local church or ministry position.

Paul taught that it is legitimate for the person who labors in gospel work to be supported by the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:6-12 / Galatians 6:6 / 1 Timothy 5:17-18). And there were times when Paul received financial support from other churches he had established. While he was ministering in Thessalonica, more than once the Philippian believers brought financial support to Paul (Philippians 4:16). And the believers in northern Greece supported Paul while he was in southern Greece (2 Corinthians 11:9).

So, here was Paul's pattern when it came to money and ministry: he would take support from other churches that he had already established. But to avoid the appearance of taking advantage of new believers, Paul wouldn't take support from the church where he was currently serving. Paul was again giving them an example by giving his time and effort.

Paul was ready to do whatever it took to make sure that the focus stayed on Christ and not himself. He was willing to sacrifice and struggle, like a good mother. Paul says he *worked night and day*. The NET of 1 Thessalonians 2:9 says – *For you recall, brothers and sisters, our toil and drudgery*. Paul made it obvious to the Thessalonians that he wasn't in the ministry to make a lot of money. He was in the ministry to make a lot of Jesus.

Paul didn't want people to think that there is a price for the gospel. Indeed, it was Christ himself who paid the price for the gospel. Away with those charlatans of today who say you have to believe their "right now" prophetic words "right now," and you must activate them by sowing a financial seed "right now" into their ministry. What a distraction! What a deception! What a disgrace! Don't be fooled by these fools! In the name of the gospel, they are denying the gospel. Their victims are not buying a blessing. But those charlatans are purchasing perdition for themselves.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10, Paul gives an example that helps to apply this to all believers, and not just ministers. *For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, 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. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.* Paul says that people ought to work if they are able. But even if you are retired, even if you must rely on others, you don't have to be idle. There is always prayer and ministry to be done and help with. You can have consistency. You can have integrity. You can be a grace giver. You can demonstrate the difference. You can always be a blessing.