



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

---

Volume 14 Issue 33

August 16, 2015

## **An Effective Minister, Part 5**

Card tricks can be pretty amazing. When the trick is performed well, the onlookers typically ask: *"How did you do that?"*

That is the question of the hour today, isn't it? A family of ten rears their children to love and know Christ and we want to know, *"How'd they do it?"*

A couple is married for seventy years and genuinely loves each other... what's the question? *"How did they maintain a loving relationship over seventy years?"*

A relatively quiet and shy individual is used by God to bring hundreds to the Lord and the

question we ask, “What did they do?”

Many of the answers that might be given could simply be anecdotal and therefore of little help to us. For example, over the past couple of years, different centenarians have been asked to reveal their secret to long life. For example, one elderly gentleman suggested that we need to “*drink a shot of whisky every day.*” Another said, “*Have eggs, bacon, and a donut every morning for breakfast.*” Another one suggested that we need to “*Smoke one cigarette per day.*” And still another said, “*it’s clean living.*” The advice goes on and on.

But what if we could get an authoritative response? Imagine listening to Christ talk with a married man on how to be a great husband! We’d sit up and listen, wouldn’t we! 1 Thessalonians 2 is the passage in which Paul explains to the Thessalonians why his ministry was so effective!

1 Thessalonians 2:1, “For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.”

Why wasn’t it in vain Paul? How is it that you were able to reap so much fruit? Aside from the good pleasure of Christ, what was it about your work that yielded fruit? Here is Paul’s explanation for why his ministry was impactful, heavy, and so of substance! Paul had such an impact in his ministry because:

1. He had a divinely wrought boldness, v. 2- he ministered knowing the greatness of God!
2. He had a passion to please God, vv. 3, 4b- he loved the Lord and so sought to honor Him in all things.
3. He was tempered by God, v. 4a- Paul understood that the more he served the Lord, the more he would be tried by God. Fidelity in ones service in the Kingdom and trial go hand-in-hand!
4. He viewed himself as a servant of the body of Christ, v. 5- he saw himself as a butler in Christ’s household!
5. He did NOT claim any of the prerogatives he had as a servant of Christ, v. 6- for you and me they are many; again consider the “one another” passages in Scripture.
6. He was meek, v. 7- like a skilled surgeon, he knew when to be strong and when to be gentle in ministry.

And this brings us to the seventh point: Paul’s service involves the imparting of Himself.

1 Thessalonians 2:8, “Having thus a fond 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 from the beginning of this study, Kingdom ministry is about investing in people

the word of God, that they "...may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (v. 12). This clearly is what Paul was about! Yet what Paul says here significantly expands our understanding of how he did this.

Consider with me the choice of Paul's words: "Having thus a fond affection for you." This is another instance where Paul chose a word that is used nowhere else in the Bible. In secular Greek the word means to "long for someone with deep yearning" which seems to be the idea here. Notice further that Paul chose to write this in the present tense which makes this a double entendre: (1) Grammatically Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of the love he had for them in the past, yet (2) Relationally, Paul's love for them had continued unto the present.

Secondly, he writes, "we were well-pleased." This word primarily means "to take pleasure in something." In some instances, the meaning verges on "resolving" which seems to be the idea here, "We were well- pleased to resolve..."

Thirdly, "to impart to you." Paul was quite purposed in what he was about! He wasn't simply about proclaiming a message; he also was about the giving of himself!

Fourth, "not only the gospel of God but also our very own lives." This is an interesting statement. The word for "lives" is translated as "soul," "life," "self," etc. The Greek covers a lot of ground from "soul, life, life-principle," to "earthly life," to "person" or "being." The basic idea is that of the whole person, warts and all!

Fifth, "because you had become very dear to us." The word is a familial term used 61 times in the New Testament. It is term of endearment- like in the parent/child relationship.

From this it should be quite obvious that gospel ministry is much more than just the sharing of information, like a gospel tract or the "claims of Jesus"! It is personal and therefore will involve risk.

Now in this regard, Paul said that "He purposed to share his life!" What does that mean? What does it mean to impart one's life to others? To answer this we must consider the structure of this verse. Paul's use of the words "life" and "the gospel of God" are both controlled by the same verb, "impart." That means whatever "imparting" Paul did with his "soul"/"life" must parallel how the "gospel" also was imparted to the Thessalonians.

So, how was the gospel imparted to the Thessalonians? Notice the impartation was objective and NOT subjective. Let me explain what we mean by this.

For example the Bible sets forth the doctrine of justification. "Justification" is a legal term used when a judge officially declares that an accused person is not guilty of the charge(s) against him. Let me ask you: when a judge does that, is the accused mystically changed

from the inside out? NO! Accordingly we say that justification is NOT subjective (occurring within), BUT objective (occurring without/outside of the individual). So when we read Romans 5 we understand that the saved individual received a positive verdict when it came to his guilt before God. Man's sinful nature did not change; his legal standing did!

Romans 5:1: "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So when Paul spoke of "imparting the gospel" to those in Thessalonica, we understand this to denote an objective activity- taking place on the outside. Paul made verbal assertions about God, His Kingdom, the Messiah, and the work our Lord had done on the cross. These assertions were heard and understood by the listeners. That was how the gospel was "imparted" to Thessalonica!

From this we conclude that that also was how Paul shared his life with the Thessalonians. The sharing was NOT mystical or above-nature. It was verbal and involved interaction. And so when Paul came to Thessalonica he not only shared information about God's Kingdom, but also personal, even intimate things about himself- his fears, burdens, worries, and concerns. His objective was NOT simply the Thessalonians' salvation, but their entire lives- and so there was an interchange and so mixing of lives!

This is another reason why Paul was so effective in Thessalonica! Effective ministry means getting involved in people's lives and allowing them to get involved in yours. Ernest Best put it this way:

The true missionary is not someone specialized in the delivery of the message but someone whose whole being, completely committed to a message which demands all, is communicated to his hearers. (Best, 1993)

To which Leon Morris adds:

There is an intensity of expression which is a rebuke to that tepid service that keeps the innermost self to oneself and is always a cause of ineffectiveness. Vital Christian service is costly. (Morris, 1959, p. 58)

We see this in the rest of this section, this epistle, and the Pauline Corpus. If you read Paul's letters carefully, you walk away knowing some incredible things about Paul. For example, we learn about...

- His fears- like when he was at Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:3), Macedonia (2 Corinthians 7:5), or Galatia (Galatians 2:12).
- His sin- like when he verbally attacked the high priest (Acts 23:3).

- His doubts concerning the effectiveness of his ministry (Galatians 4:11).
- His self-deprecating view of his worth- not only as an apostle but as a person as well (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:9; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 1:15).
- His intimidation when it came to sharing the gospel (Ephesians 6:19-20).
- His tendency toward worry- which at times consumed him (1 Thessalonians 3:1).
- His grave disappointment- and even embarrassment- at being imprisoned (Philippians 1:12; 2 Timothy 2:9).
- His pain when others attacked him- like Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy 4:14).
- The betrayal he felt in Rome by the supposed Christian leaders (Philippians 1:17).
- His non-stop struggle with sin (Romans 7:14ff).
- His aspiration to minister in Spain (Romans 15:28).

Paul had weaknesses, doubts, struggles, worries, concerns, jealousies, fears, aspirations, passions, and much more... and we know them! In fact I dare say that Paul was so transparent- he shared his life so freely- we know more about Paul than we do many in the body of Christ sitting next to us! That is sad! Yet that is what is involved in effective ministry; a concern for the whole man and so a purposed sharing not only of the gospel, but one's life!

Think of it in this way... if ministry is about completion and NOT simply conversion, THEN we are about helping one another respond Biblically/healthily to the various and sundry things of life. How can we do this if our disciples don't know how we overcame the same struggles which they face?

- *"Dad, I'm struggling with doubts!"* Sinner! I have never doubted my salvation!
- *"Dad, I'm struggling with temptation!"* Sinner! I have never struggled with that!

If you witnessed such parenting, how helpful do you suppose the parent would be?

I hope you see how this broadens our understanding of the ministry! It is NOT simply about conveying the truth of the gospel. It is purposed and intentionally living it out with one another. This will involve risk and purposed interaction. Recall Paul's exhortation to the wealthy on how to minister with their wealth:

1 Timothy 6:17, 18, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world... to do good [this is generic; be a man or woman of God], to be rich in good works [diligently strive to be a godly individual], to be generous [with their money] and ready to share."

The word for "ready to share" is κοινωνικός (*koinōnikos*) which is the compound of κοινωνία (*koinōnia*)- the word for fellowship- and οἶκος (*oikos*)- from which we get the word "economics." *The idea is doing far more than writing a check; it is individually and purposefully using your wealth as a means of involving yourself in the lives of the people you*

*are seeking to help.* We see it in Romans 1.

Romans 1:11-12, “For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine.”

When Paul thought of ministry, he thought of the mutual interaction of souls by which the participants are challenged and encouraged to serve the Lord. This necessarily involves the risk of opening up and sharing one’s burdens! Lastly, consider Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10:24-25, “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”

This passage directly criticizes those whose church attendance is infrequent, “...let us not forsake assembling together!” However, it goes way beyond this. To attend a church and do nothing more than receive is a forsaking of that body! Did you know that? In fact those who do that today ironically resemble the many charlatans of Paul’s day who viewed people as nothing more than a vehicle to their own benefit or pleasure!

In contrast, notice how “not forsaking the assembling” is modified in Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10:24a, “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds...”

Hebrews 10:25b: “...encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”

The essence of effective ministry is “encouraging one another” which will include a purposed involving of your life in the lives of others!

In this regard, let me encourage you. Today there is a lot of talk about transparency and being real- not being phony! Listen, phoniness occurs when we outright lie about ourselves. Saying the glass is half-full or half-empty is about one’s mental bent, specifically where we choose to set our minds. It is NOT phony to say the glass is half-full when the Eeyore in you says it is half-empty! In fact, how we choose to view it will determine somewhat the course of our lives.

Proverbs 23:7, “As [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (KJV)

So when do we open up and share our struggles, doubts, and worries? First, wisdom dictates that we open up when ministerially our openness will encourage and/or edify another! We are NOT about dumping for the sake of dumping. RATHER, Paul’s ministry was

a purposed/intentioned sharing that the believer might be built up in Christ! Again, this is something Paul resolved to do! Think of it... all of the personal information we know about Paul was given in didactic passages written to instruct the body of Christ. Paul was a master at purposed sharing!

The eighth element of an effective ministry involve Paul's focus on giving, not receiving.

1 Thessalonians 2:9, "For you recall, brethren, our labor [wearisome toil- κόπος (*koros*)] and hardship [giving reference to the pain involved- μόχθος (*mochthos*)], *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden [a weight] to any of you..."

From other passages we know that Paul was trained as a tent-maker<sup>1</sup> (Acts 18:3). The word actually translates as "leather maker" which means Paul was skilled in working with leather goods: curtains, cloaks, tarps, clothing, tents, and the like. In fact, the word could even have a larger connotation in reference to Paul. Just as we use the term "saddler" today to denote a worker or a dealer in leather (he does far more than make saddles), so also Paul's reference to "leather-making" could also have involved working in the dealing of the goods in a market.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless, leather-making was hard work and no doubt how Paul made money in Thessalonica. In fact, the text indicates that Paul worked "night and day." This doesn't mean he worked non-stop. Rather it indicates that he worked during the day as well as the night in order to make a living so that he could preach the gospel.

Now, you might ask, "*I thought in the Bible that ministers were supposed to be supported by the people to whom they minister?*" And yet, that is exactly right. When Christ sent out the seventy disciples, He gave this exhortation:

Luke 10:4-7, "Carry no purse, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. And whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace *be* to this house.' And if a man of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him; but if not, it will return to you. And stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages..."

We understand that by God's design a preacher ought to make his living from teaching the word of God. In fact, Paul wrote this:

1 Timothy 5:17-18, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor [that is, financial remuneration], especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'"

And so Paul would most certainly have been within his right to accept support from the Thessalonians. Yet he didn't! In fact, we note that this was a pattern in Paul's ministry... he

never received monies directly from the people he minister to. Paul asked the Corinthians who criticized him for not charging money for his teaching (as if charging money made the teaching more authoritative or true.).

2 Corinthians 11:7, "Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?"

To the Ephesian elders Paul said this:

Acts 20:34, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my *own* needs and to the men who were with me."

This does not mean that Paul never was supported by the church.

Philippians 4:15-16, "And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a *gift* more than once for my needs."

It is that Paul never accepted money or support from those he ministered to directly!

Why did Paul refuse direct support from those He minister to? Elsewhere we know that He did NOT want to be a hindrance to the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:10b-12, "...the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to *thresh* in hope of sharing *the* crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ."

What hindrance is Paul here speaking about? The hindrance that would come if Paul's listeners- associating him with the many charlatans of his day- thought Paul was preaching so that they would give him money!

Again, that was a very real threat for Paul as he ministered on the frontier! Thousands were the pleaders with a cause; accordingly Paul did NOT want Christ or His Kingdom to be associated with them in any way so he never accepted direct support.

But secondly and our current point, Paul wanted to set an example of how a minister ought to go about his ministry- expecting to give and get nothing in return! Paul expanded upon the teaching he gave in our passage in 2 Thessalonians 3.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example,



because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you [the example...], nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you [this is the message in our passage; notice how Paul expanded upon it here...]; not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example."<sup>3</sup>

I hope you see that the effective ministry is about giving, not getting! It clearly was NOT about what Paul received, BUT the Christ He endeavored to give! And so it must be when it comes to our lives and ministry as well!

Yet this will be hard in our current culture. Every generation living today is the "ME!" generation! It truly is about us! Sadly this mentality has crept into the church. You see it in your own heart and thinking. A large part of our work in this church is about us: our fulfillment, comfort, pleasure, and fun. From the people we talk to, to the fellowship gathering we attend... it is about us! I personally am so convicted by Paul's words of lamentation in Philippians 2 where Paul speaks of Timothy:

Philippians 2:20-21, "For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus."

How we must see, effective ministry will occur in our lives when we place Christ above ourselves and so His ministry above our own. Until that happens, we will remain in what has become a rut and the norm of body life: everyman for himself! May God give us the grace to "take up our cross and follow Him" (Luke 9:23-25)!

## Bibliography

Best, E. (1993). *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians (Black's New Testament Commentary)*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Morris, L. (1959). *1 and 2 Thessalonians (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*. Chicago: Intervarsity Academic.

## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Paul's trade was closely connected with the principal product of Paul's native province, a cloth of goats' hair called *cilicium*, used for cloaks, curtains, and other fabrics designed to give protection against wet.

<sup>2</sup> This would explain how Paul's family could have attained such a standing as to acquire Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28; 24:26)!

<sup>3</sup> cf. also Acts 20:34-35.