

A Study of 1 Thessalonians



Paul spent the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians thanking God for the Christians in Thessalonica and commending them for imitating the gospel messengers and Christ himself. They had joyfully received the gospel, shared their faith near and far in the face of much opposition, changed their pagan lifestyles into Christ honouring ones, and built their lives on the hope of the return of Christ.

In chapter 2, Paul turns to the work of the missionaries and a description of their lives and ministry.

The Missionary Work Took Place in the Face of Great Opposition (2:1-2)

In Philippi, Paul and Silas had been stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison with their feet in stocks. From Philippi they made their way directly to Thessalonica. They faced not just verbal abuse, but violent life threatening physical abuse with malicious intent. Paul's opponents would like him dead. In Thessalonica again faced great opposition and had to flee to Berea at night.

In spite of his suffering and shameful treatment in Philippi, Paul continued to faithfully discharge his duty as a servant of God. The idea of being "shamefully treated" is that of "insulting and outrageous treatment designed to publicly insult and openly humiliate the person who suffers from it."¹

One might look at what Paul and his companions endured and conclude: "It's not worth the effort." Paul clearly did not view his ministry this way because he says in 1 Thess. 2:1, "our coming to you was not in vain."² The ministry in Thessalonica was not a failure.

The missionary effort was not in vain because 1) people responded to the gospel message and became Christians. 2) The missionary effort would not have been in vain even if people had not responded because the gospel was preached as God had directed them to do.

1. Are we able to look at the number we have baptised or use any other form of measurement to determine whether or not our efforts have been in vain? Explain the reason for your answer.

2. Describe how the word "boldness" is used in 2:2.



¹ Smith, James E. *Teacher's Commentary: Eschatological Epistles*. Lulu. 2001, p. 22.

² Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

The Motives of the Gospel Preachers (2:3-4)

It seems likely that some may have called Paul's motives into question. He strongly asserts that the appeal of the evangelists did not spring from any motivation that was impure or self-serving.

Their motive was not from "error." The message was a message of truth. There was nothing impure about their motives. Paul was not after their money nor any other personal benefit. He did not attempt to deceive them. He did not use trickery or falsehood to deceive them. He believed what he taught and wanted them only to be obedient to Christ.

3. In verse 4, Paul claims to have been approved by God. How can we know this is so?
4. What does it mean to be "entrusted with the gospel?"
5. What was the motivation of the missionaries according to verse 4?

The Methods of the Gospel Preachers (2:5-7)

1. The missionaries did not use flattery. They did not say things that were either untrue to influence the Thessalonians nor did they speak in such a way as to influence them apart from God's word. They were sincere.
2. The missionaries were not greedy. They did not use a "cloak" or a "pretext" to gain personal reward from the Thessalonians. We again see the sincerity of Paul and his companions.
3. The missionaries were not looking for personal glory. It is true that some are drawn to the messenger of the gospel and not the message. Paul wasn't looking for the esteem of men. He was not looking for the praise and adoration of people.
4. The missionaries were gentle.
6. In what ways can flattery be used to manipulate people?
7. What could a "greedy" or "glory seeking" leader hope to gain from the people to whom he preaches?



8. Why is a "nursing mother" a good description of gentleness?

The Heart of the Gospel Preachers (2:8)

Verse 8 is a beautiful verse in which Paul bares his heart to the Christians in Thessalonica. He claims that he and the other missionaries were “affectionately desirous” of the Christians and ready to share not only the gospel but their own lives. These words are intensely compassionate and caring.

While the power is in the message of the gospel, people will not long listen to any speaker who does not care about them. It is possible to speak true words from Scripture, but fail because there is a lack of caring for people.

9. Is it more important that a Christian leader speak all truth or that he care for the people? Or are both equal? Why did you answer the way you did?

10. How does one go about sharing his own life with another?

The Work of the Gospel Preachers (2:9-12)

Paul appealed to the Thessalonians to remember the efforts of the missionaries. While Paul and his companions were among them, they laboured and toiled day and night to provide for their own needs. They did not take from those to whom they preached. In no way were they a “burden” to the believers in Thessalonica.

The believers (as well as God) could also see the conduct of the preachers. They were holy, righteous, and blameless in their conduct toward the new converts.

11. Describe the importance of the conduct of a preacher to the success of the gospel message.

11. Define the following words as used in verse 12:

a. exhort

b. encourage

c. charge

12. In what way or ways does a father relate differently to children than a mother?

The teaching of Paul to the new converts was to live a life that was worthy of God. The gospel makes strong demands upon disciples. The one who would follow God has been called to a holy life that honours God with every word and every action.



Living in a worthy manner is so important when we realise that Christians have been called into the very kingdom and glory of God. What a wondrous blessing it is to be a part of God's Kingdom on earth while looking forward to God's eternal Kingdom in heaven.

Paul's recounting of his own ministry showed that his efforts were not in vain. He had been faithful to Christ in spite of vigorous opposition, his motives had been pure, his methods were never self-seeking, but pointed to Christ, his heart was one of love and compassion, and his hard work for the gospel and his own provision was evident to all.

13. What are some of the main lessons from this passage that we might apply to our own lives as we seek to share the gospel with a lost world?