

# 1 Thessalonians: Chapter 2

Wayne Dalrymple, M.D.

1 Thessalonians chapter 2 is where we will be looking at today. My name is Wayne Dalrymple. And so we're going to be continuing our study of 1 Thessalonians. We'll be looking at chapter two at this time. In chapter two, Paul begins with what some have called a defense of his ministry. Paul goes into some detail and reminds the Thessalonians about how he and those who were with him behaved while they were there in Thessalonica.

And so let's read, beginning in chapter 2, verses 1 through 8. "For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us."

And so Paul here describes how they behaved. He describes the success of their ministry there. Paul had likely been accused of having false motives, while he and those who were with him were in Thessalonica. False motives for his preaching, that he was accused of trying to take advantage of the Thessalonians. But certainly, Paul says that was not even close to the truth. In fact, first of all, he says in verse one, that their message was not empty. He says, that "our coming to you was not in vain." It was not futile, it was not useless. But rather it was worthy. It was full, and it did exactly what it was intended to do. In verses 2 through 4, Paul talks about the persecution that they had faced. He says, "But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi." See that Paul and Silas and the others had been at Philippi. And remember how Paul and Silas had been put into prison, and had been beaten? And yet, then they continued to preach and to teach, even teaching their jailer and converting him and his family. And then we have how then they left Philippi, and eventually, they get to Thessalonica. And the experience of that persecution and the threat of possible persecution, as they continued, did not stop them from continuing to preach and to teach the gospel of Christ.

Now and so Paul says, this is an evidence of them being truthful, of their being sincere in their teaching. If Paul had been trying to take advantage, if he was insincere in his motives, and just trying to, for example, make money off of them, then that would mean he would, it wouldn't have been worth it for him to go through the persecution that they went through. He would have gone somewhere else where it was easier to take advantage of people. But Paul says, they endured the persecution, and that is proof that they were sincere and that what they were speaking was indeed, the Word of God. And so he says that they were not trying to please people, but God in what they were preaching and teaching.

Paul and his companions did also face opposition in Thessalonica, as we know, from Acts chapter 17, verses 1 through 9. And we see that word, that Greek word, that's translated "opposition" there, is from the word that the English, we get the word "agony." And so, it was a severe persecution. It was a severe opposition that they faced. Paul here, in this passage, appeals to their memory of how he and his companions preached with sincerity and boldness. Notice, once again, he says to them, in verse 5, he says, "For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed, God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ." And so he says, "We were sincere, we were not using flattering speech, but rather it was simply boldness and sincerity, that they were showing."

Paul says, notice in verse 4, that they were entrusted with the gospel. They were entrusted with the gospel. I think this is a an interesting phrase that he uses here. It's the idea of something that's left in their keeping, something that they are stewards over. Paul describes himself as a steward on a number of occasions. He also describes himself as having the gospel within them, and that they are in charge of. In 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 7, he says, "We have this treasure," speaking of the gospel. "We have this treasure in jars of clay." And so, he certainly felt a responsibility. In Romans chapter 1, he called himself a debtor, both to Jews and to Greeks. And he said he was not ashamed of the gospel (Romans chapter 1, verses 15 and 16). In 1 Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 16, he expresses how he felt an obligation to preach the gospel. He says, "Woe is me, or woe unto me, if I do not preach the gospel." And so, it was indeed entrusted with them.

And so, Paul then goes on to talk about that they did not have selfish motives, they did not speak with flattering speech, or have greed as their motives. And then notice in verses 6 through 8, Paul, in this phrase, never tried to be a burden on others. Notice in verse 6, again, he says, "Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, that we could have made demands as apostles of Christ." Paul says they could have demanded to be supported, they could have demanded certain things. But they didn't. In fact, he says, just the opposite in verse 7, they were gentle among them, like a nursing mother. What a comparison that's given here. Paul describes the way that they treated the Thessalonians, like a nursing mother, caring, and kind and tender toward them.

And then he says, verse 8, "So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." It was normal for Paul and those who were with him to work for themselves, to support themselves, so that those who were there in that town would not have to support them while they were preaching. And one of the main reasons for that is, really two reasons: One, that they would not be a burden on them, and then secondly, so that no one could accuse them of having impure motives. And so that Paul reminds them of how they acted and how they supported themselves. And so, if they had tried to take advantage of the Thessalonians, they did a very poor job of it. But that's certainly not the case. They did not try to take advantage of them.

And so then we move on to verses 9 through 12. And we see Paul here describes the purity of his ministry. He says, "For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and

encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”

And so here again, Paul reminds them how they worked night and day. They worked tirelessly, as they were preaching the gospel to them. And so again, they did not do anything to try to take advantage of the Thessalonians or try to have them support Paul, and those who were with him.

But rather, notice that Paul says that they were holy, that they were righteous and blameless. These three words, here. The word “holy” — another version says they were “devout in their actions.” That means they were dedicated to God's service. And so, it's the same word that's translated, sometimes, or a form of the word is translated “saints,” or “sanctify,” “to be dedicated to God's service.” And so they certainly were holy.

“Righteous” means that they kept God's law as they were preaching to them. And “blameless” is just the the negative form of saying the same thing. That means, they could not be judged by the law. There was no legitimate way in which they could be judged by God's law. And so, Paul reminds them that they were doing exactly as they ought to be doing, when they were preaching to them.

Now notice, earlier in this passage, we looked at in verse 7, Paul describes himself and compares himself to a mother. But in this section, in verse 11, he describes himself like a father. And so, he says, “You know how like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God.” And so, there are differences in the way a mother treats her children, and the way a father treats his children. They're both from a place of love, and care and concern, but they take different roles in somewhat different forms. And so, Paul says that he was kind and caring and tender with them like a mother. But then he was also encouraging, exhorting, and urging them like a father would. And so, he gives that parallel and all those who are with him as well were that way. But notice also that Paul, and then the others, were exhorting encouraging and charging each one of them, not just as a group or as a whole, but each one individually. In other words, the individual is important in the eyes of God. Sometimes we get consumed with numbers. We think about, well, how big can our group be? How many people can we get in our group? And we certainly, we want to have more and more people who are members of the body of Christ. But at the same time, the only way that that can really take place is if we focus upon the individuals. And so we need to encourage each person to remain faithful, and to be strong in the Lord.

We have, especially as preachers and elders, we have a responsibility toward new Christians as these Thessalonians would have been. Just a few months removed from their conversion, as Paul is writing this letter. And so, Paul is trying to encourage them, just as he was doing after their conversion while he was there, to remain faithful, to continue to grow. And so we have a responsibility toward those who are new converts, new Christians today, to teach and to encourage them. To grow, and to help them, to show them, how to do that. Sometimes we have a tendency to, when we bring someone to Christ and we baptize them in water, it's often the case that then we say, “Well, our work is done. And so now you're on your own. It's up to you to figure out how to grow.” That's not how the Bible describes the way the church interacted during this time in the first century. And it's certainly not how we ought to be doing today. You know, we need to be looking at those babes in Christ, as Peter calls them in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 2, and help them to drink that pure milk of the word so that they can grow. And so we need to take that responsibility very seriously.

Then notice also something that I think is interesting in verse 12, that he says, they encouraged them to “walk in a manner worthy of God.” We might say, “Well, none of us is worthy of God. None of us is worthy of God's love and, and being able to go to heaven.” Well, in that sense, certainly that's true. But that's not the way that Paul is using this term here. Paul is saying, we need to live faithful lives. We need to live in such a way that God sees our hearts, that they are sincere, and that we are striving to live for Him and grow closer to him each day. Very similar to what Paul says in Philippians chapter 1 and verse 27. He says, “Let your manner of life be that which becomes the gospel of Jesus Christ.” And perhaps we can also compare it to what Paul says in Romans chapter 6, in verses 1 and 2, when he says that we should not continue in sin that grace may abound. That's the way that we walk in a manner worthy of God, by living in such a way that we don't just say, “Well, I'm just going to live however I want to, and let God's grace cover me.” God does not want us to do that at all. He wants us to live purely, holy, sincerely before him.

And so, Paul then goes on, to talk about how the Thessalonians responded, how they reacted to his message in verses 13 through 16. Let's read that together. “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!”

And so in this section, Paul begins by saying, describing how they accepted the message that they were preaching. He says, “You accepted it not as the word of men, but as it really is, the word of God.” This is one of the passages that certainly affirms the inspiration of the Bible, and especially the inspiration or the authority that Paul and those who were with him had in proclaiming the words that they were speaking to them. And so they recognized that what they were teaching did indeed come from God. And so Paul reminds them of this so that they will not turn away from it. That they will remain steadfast in that word.

But notice also Paul says that that “word works in us.” The last part of verse 13, he says, “Which is at work in you believers.” God's word is at work in us. And how is it at work in us? It is transforming us, as Paul describes in Romans chapter 12 and verse 2. And so, it is transforming us, conforming us to the image of His glory, Paul also says. And so, the Thessalonians certainly were reminded of that, and that certainly would encourage them to remain true to what Paul had taught them.

Then Paul goes on to say, and commend them, for how that they had imitated the churches in Judea. That is, Judea would be the province where Jerusalem was located in southern Israel. And so, Paul reminds them about that, and says, that they had suffered, just like the Christians in Judea had suffered. The Christians in Judea had largely suffered at the hands of the Jews in that area. And Paul says here that they suffered at the hands of their own countrymen. That seems to imply that they were largely made up of Gentiles, the church there in Thessalonica. That doesn't mean that there weren't any Jews. In fact, they're probably were some Jews. And so, that's why in Acts chapter 7, we see that it was largely mostly the Jews that were leading the opposition toward Paul in his companions. And so, that doesn't mean that there were no Jews who were still persecuting them, even though he says “your own countrymen.” In fact, he could simply be referring to the fact of their

own countrymen, that is the other citizens of Thessalonica, whether they were Jew or Gentile. And so, certainly, that is, I think, included here. But either way they were mirroring, they were imitating, what the Christians in Judea were going through, because of suffering and enduring that persecution.

And so, notice here he says, they were imitating the churches of God in Judea. That is, the churches that belong to God, just as they were the Church of God. In fact, notice, if we look back in chapter 1, verse 1, Paul says that he's writing to "the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." And so there's a connection that is made between those two churches. The Jews certainly had committed many terrible acts toward Jesus, as Paul mentions here, and thus toward God the Father as well. And so, they had persecuted. Remember when Paul is on the road to Damascus, in Acts chapter 9, and Jesus appears to him. And Jesus says, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Had Saul ever physically met Jesus on earth? We're not told that he ever did. But he was persecuting Jesus because He was persecuting those who followed Jesus. Well, in a similar way, these countrymen who were persecuting the Thessalonians were in turn then, persecuting God, they were opposing God.

Let's move on now to verses 17 through 20. Verses 17 through 20, we see Paul describes how he really longs to see them. "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy."

And so Paul, in this passage expresses great sorrow over the fact that he had to be separated from the Thessalonians. His ministry was cut short there. He did not intend to leave as early as he did. But because of the persecution, that the Jews especially in Thessalonica, had brought against him and Silas and Timothy, Paul and Silas especially had to leave. And they had to get out of there. In fact, they left at night to escape from the persecution. But Paul said, "I did not mean to leave that early." He says they were torn away from them. Notice here he calls them brothers, he has a bond with them that he felt. And so, when he says that they were, he was torn away from them. He felt it very strongly. In fact, this word, this Greek word that's translated "torn away" here, literally means "being orphaned from you." That's very strong indeed.

Paul and his companions, he says, were hindered from coming to them, verse 18 tells us. He said, "Satan hindered us." Now, how did Satan hinder them? Well, we're never told that there were demons who, who stood in their way to keep them from going back to Thessalonica. Most likely, Paul is referring to the fact that the Jewish people in Thessalonica would not allow them to come back. Their persecution, even as they followed Paul and those who were with him to Berea, and made trouble for them there as well. And so it seems likely that Paul is saying that Satan used them, to hinder him from coming back to Thessalonica.

There were those who were accusing Paul of not caring about them, because he did not come back to them. But it seems that Paul here is saying, "That's not the case, but rather it was Satan, hindering us," because of the persecution that was taking place. Now, certainly, Satan will use us today, or will use those who are opposed to God rather. And so, we must be careful. And we must recognize that we are wrestling against powers of darkness. We're not wrestling against flesh and blood, Paul says in Ephesians chapter 6. We're wrestling against powers of darkness, against

principalities and authorities and wickedness in high places. And so, we must be ready, whenever opposition shows its face. And we must stand up strong. But sometimes we must know that we have to find other ways of doing what God wants us to do. Just as Paul was not allowed, was hindered from coming back to Thessalonica, he ended up writing these two letters to them, to encourage them, and to instruct them even more. And so sometimes we can be creative in the way that we continue to do the Lord's work.

Notice in verses 19, and 20, that Paul describes the Thessalonians as their “joy and crown,” as their reason for boasting in the Lord Jesus. What a great way for Paul to describe them. Can you imagine if you were in Thessalonica, and you received this letter, and you read that you were reason for Paul's boasting in the Lord, that You were Paul's joy, and crown. What a great feeling that would be. And certainly, Paul must have had a special place in his heart for the Thessalonians. Now, he certainly had some similar things to say about other churches as well. But I wonder if Paul had had a really special place for the Thessalonians in his heart, because of the fact that he was torn away from them so quickly, because he felt badly for them because he did not get to teach them and encourage them as much as he would have liked. Of course, the Bible doesn't tell us specifically about Paul feelings in that regard. But it seems here that this may at least, give us a hint as to that idea. And so, Paul, certainly wanted to see them again. But the next best thing was, one, to write this letter, but also then, as we're going to see in the next chapter, he would send Timothy to see how they were doing.

And so, that concludes chapter 2, as we continue in 1 Thessalonians.