

“Qualifications of Spiritual Leaders”

October 1, 2017

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

I. Introduction

Most of Paul’s letters had sections written to respond to some attack that had been made against him or the Gospel. Even after he had left Thessalonica, the enemies of the gospel, unbelieving Jews, pagan Gentiles, false teachers, continued to attack him. Both his motives and his methods of ministry had come under fire by those who wanted to discredit him and his ministry. They hoped to ruin the new church by destroying its confidence in the person God used to found it. Today’s Scripture is Paul’s response to his detractors. Paul gave three pictures to describe his relationship with the Thessalonians.

II. Pictures of a Spiritual Leader

A. 1st he was **A Faithful Servant of God.**

In **Romans 1:1** Paul called himself “**Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.**” A servant owns nothing, but possesses and uses everything that belongs to his master. Every servant must one day give an account of his service to his master. In **1 Thess 2:4**, Paul wrote, “**We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.**” Paul described how he served God.

1. He shared the Gospel boldly. Paul and Silas had been beaten and humiliated in Philippi, but, although it had been a terrible experience, Paul didn’t change his approach. He didn’t try to be more tactful and less outspoken about the Gospel. When they came to Thessalonica, he preached faithfully and boldly “**in spite of strong opposition**” just as he did everywhere they went. It had not been easy to start a church in Philippi and it was not easy to start one in Thessalonica. But Paul’s boldness was “**with the help of God.**” Paul trusted God to give him strength. In **Philippians 4:13** he wrote, “**I can do all this through him who gives me strength.**”

2. He shared the Gospel without error—Paul wrote, “The appeal we make does not spring from error.” Paul assured them that his message was true, i.e., without error. He had received the Gospel from God, not man—turn to Galatians 1:11-18. In 2 Corinthians 2:17 he wrote, “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.” Paul didn’t tweak the Gospel message to make it more acceptable to the culture.

3. He shared the Gospel with pure motives. Paul wrote that his motives were not impure. Some people in Paul’s day used religion as a means for making money. Others used religion to satisfy their pride. Still others sought to make converts for sexual favors. Paul and his helpers had no impure or ulterior motives, nor were they sexually immoral spiritual leaders; they spoke the truth out of pure lives. Their methods were with pure motives—to serve God and win the lost to Jesus.

4. He shared the Gospel without trickery--in 1 Corinthians 2:4 Paul wrote, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.” Paul didn’t trick people into being saved. Salvation doesn’t lie at the end of a clever argument or a subtle presentation. It is the result of God’s Word and the power of the Holy Spirit—as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:7 God will make it grow.

5. His motivation for sharing the Gospel was to please God. The ministry of evangelism had been given to Paul by God, and it was to God alone that he felt accountable. To speak in a way pleasing to men and women may well produce a growing congregation, but the test was whether or not he are pleasing God. Micah 6:8 puts it this way, “And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Because his motivation was to please God, there was no place for flattery, or deceit, or greed in his message or his life. As we read in 1 Thess. 2:6, “We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.”

B. A Loving Mother Paul’s 2nd picture was that of a loving mother. A better translation for

1 Thessalonians 2:7 is “We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.” Paul reminded the Thessalonians that instead of using his God-given authority or being abusive and demeaning as many false teachers, he “proved to be gentle among you.” He was gentle.

To be **gentle** means to be kind to someone; it encompasses a host of other virtues such as acceptance, respect, compassion, tolerance of imperfections, patience, tenderheartedness, and loyalty. Unlike many itinerant teachers, Paul and his friends did not come to Thessalonica to exploit the people for their own prosperity, but to live and serve among them with kindness and gentleness. They came to be tenderly nurturing to the newborn Christians that would come to the Lord.

A second quality that was modeled by Paul was **motherly love**—or as other versions put it, a “*fond affection*.” The affection of a mother for her children—motherly love—has no equal anywhere else. This love isn’t out of a sense of obligation but it is an intimate almost supernatural affection of a mother for her child. Such love leads to a mother being willing to give her life for her child.

It was with such love that Paul and Silas and Timothy came to the Thessalonian Christians. Besides sharing the Gospel, they shared their own lives. For proof, Paul urged the Thessalonians to remember the toil and hardships they had gone through for them. Just like a mother doesn’t expect compensation for nursing her children, for sharing her deep motherly-love for them or for meeting their every need sacrificially in heartfelt love, Paul told the church that he and his helpers had no desire for the compensation they had a right to expect.

Paul didn’t want to be a burden to any of the Thessalonians because he knew they lacked material resources. Though they gave generously and sacrificially for the believers in Jerusalem, they gave out of their poverty (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). For that reason he worked night and day with his hands to support himself and those with him. So Paul pictured Silas, Timothy, and himself as spiritual mothers who made the maximum effort to provide gentleness, intimate affection, sacrificial love, and hard-working provision as they “preached the gospel of God” to the new Christians.

C. A Concerned Father

The third picture that describes Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians is a concerned father. Fathers must live so that they are good examples to their children—whether we like it or not, children copy their parents. Paul called the Thessalonian Christians as witnesses that his life had been “**holy, righteous and blameless.**” None of the members of the church could accuse Paul or his companions of being poor examples.

A father must not only **support the family** by working, like Paul did making tents, and by **teaching the family by being a good example**, he must also take time to **speak to the family members**. Paul knew the importance of teaching these new believers the truths that would help them grow in the Lord. He was a teacher and a motivator. And it wasn't only in a group situation—Paul dealt with each of the believers personally: “**For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children.**” There are times when one-to-one conversations are necessary.

As a father, Paul **encouraged** the new believers. New Christians need someone to encourage them in the Lord. They need directing and instruction in living a Christian life. This isn't scolding; it's encouragement to go on with the Lord. Paul also **comforted** them—this is similar to encouragement with the emphasis on activity. Paul not only made them feel better, but he made them want to do better. It's not pampering, but rather encouraging one to go right back and try over again. Finally, Paul **urged** them. The word carries the idea of giving personal witness. Paul “urged” them out of his own experience with the Lord. Sometimes we go through difficulties so that we may share with others what the Lord has done for us—**2 Corinthians 1:4** says, God “**comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.**”

Paul concluded this section by giving the purpose for this fatherly witness: that you “**may live lives worthy of God.**” Like an earthly father whose goal is the mature wisdom of his children, Paul's goal

was that he would help the Thessalonian Christians mature into sons and daughters who walk mature Christian lives.

III. Conclusion

There is more here than just Paul reminding the Thessalonians of the kind of ministry he had as he taught and cared for the young church. What we find is a description of the qualifications of spiritual leaders. You may not be a pastor who stands in front of a congregation or even a member of an elder or diaconate board, but every Christian's life—actions and words—speak to those around them—to fellow Christians as well as to nonbelievers. In other words, to some degree, every Christian is a spiritual leader, it may be at home as a mother or a father raising children; it may be at work or play where others watch how a Christian responds to the good and bad things, to the temptations that come into one's life; it may be in school as fellow classmates watch how one lives when mom and dad aren't watching; it may be in a home for seniors as our bodies begin to show the ravages of age and people watch to see how we respond. We all have different circumstances, but regardless of the particulars, these characteristics of spiritual leaders are appropriate for all Christians.

If you are a Christian then you have willingly made yourself a servant of the Lord—as I remind you so often from **Romans 10:9**, “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” What kind of servant are you? Do you share the Gospel boldly in your actions and your words? Truthfully, as our culture drifts away—rather runs away from God, it is getting harder and harder to live a biblical Christian life. Are you able to share the Gospel without error? **1 Peter 3:15-16** says, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” We must not seek to win the lost

so that we can add a notch to our belt or increase our offering or to satisfy our pride or for any other reason than that people would be saved from an eternity in hell and because this is God's command to us.

As well as being a servant, are you a loving mother to fellow Christians—especially those that are hurting? I may be a little biased but Tabernacle is a place where others are nurtured and cared for—all are accepted, respected, loved with compassion, patience, and tenderheartedness. We may be small in number, but we are effective. Similarly, as concerned fathers, we encourage one another, we comfort each other and urge each other on. But we must be careful that we don't rest on our laurels but that we strive to do better even where we excel.