



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 13, 2010
Released on Wednesday, June 9, 2010**

"Pleasing to God"

Lesson Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13

Background Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2

Devotional Reading: Galatians 1:1-10

1 Thessalonians 2:1-13

1 For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

2 But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

3 For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

4 But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness:

6 Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

8 So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

9 For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

10 Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

11 As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,

12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

Lesson Aims

After this lesson each student will be able to:

1. Identify ways that Paul's behavior among the Thessalonians demonstrated his commitment to pleasing God.
2. Explain why pure motives are important to behavior that pleases God.
3. Identify a personal motive or behavior that needs to be changed for him or her to be more pleasing to God.

Introduction

Paul found it necessary to answer his opponents who were engaged in discrediting the ministry at Thessalonica. Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy, were accused of preaching a questionable message with the ulterior motive of exploiting people. The identity of their opponents is uncertain, but they evidently had raised some doubts in the minds of the Thessalonian believers.

Paul wrote about their visit to Thessalonica, recalling the hardships and challenges of the ministry. These missionaries exemplified what it means to be pleasing to God. They ministered from pure motives and did not seek the plaudits and honor of men.

Their energies were expended in the ministry and in working to meet their own material needs. They were driven by a compassionate love for the Thessalonians, serving as their spiritual parents. All the while, the behavior of Paul and his coworkers was beyond reproach. The Thessalonian believers were witnesses of these things, as was God Himself.

Results of the Ministry (1 Thessalonians 2:1,2)

1. How did the missionaries respond to opposition? (1 Thessalonians 2:1,2)

Paul recounts his experiences in Thessalonica, reminding his readers that the message that had been brought was filled with the truth of the gospel and accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:5).

Before coming to their city, he had preached in nearby *Philippi*. There, Paul and Silas were treated with contempt for preaching the gospel (Acts 16:22-24). They were beaten, stripped of their clothes, and thrown into jail with their feet placed in

irons. However, they were not deterred from their calling and mission. Once released from prison, they journeyed south to Thessalonica (16:40—17:1).

Most people who are “in it for themselves” are not willing to undergo hardship. But the Thessalonian Christians know that Paul is different. For those who know Jesus Christ, faithfulness in difficulty springs from something other than personal determination. It is based on the gospel itself. Jesus endured the cross for unworthy sinners, and He told His followers to expect similar treatment. Paul’s faithfulness in persecution is an expression of his commitment to please the God who sent His Son to die. To please God is to follow the Christ of the cross.

2. What does being persecuted say about the genuineness of one’s faith or message?

Persecution in and of itself does not prove anything. Groups of people have been persecuted throughout history for a variety of reasons, some completely unconnected to the truth or falsehood of their beliefs. When people persevere in their beliefs despite persecution, it does tell us they are deeply committed to those beliefs and may cause people to look more closely at their faith. In Paul’s case, the combination of his character, hard work, and perseverance in spite of opposition painted a picture that strongly contrasted with the false teachers of his day. If we persevere in spite of opposition, it may give us an opportunity to testify of Christ.

Conduct of the Ministry (1 Thessalonians 2:3-8)

3. What three characteristics were entirely absent from the missionaries’ appeal? (v. 3)

The missionaries’ appeal did not derive from any kind of misguided belief or error. Their message was the truth. So Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians that they had done nothing out of *deceit* (that is, the attempt to mislead people), out of *uncleanness* (which implies impure sexual motives), or out of *guile* (the deliberate use of deceptive methods). Paul is so confident of their honesty that he states it flatly, with little explanation or embellishment.

4. Why was Paul entrusted with the gospel? (v. 4)

Paul now comes to the heart of the matter. From his life-changing encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul asserted that God had allowed them to preach the gospel (1 Thess. 2:4). The word “allowed” refers to the fact that they were determined genuine and endorsed by God (1 Cor. 11:28; Tim. 3:10). He had examined and approved these missionaries. As a result, they were entrusted with the message of the gospel. Can God entrust you with the gospel?

Paul was well aware of the stewardship of preaching the gospel that had been given into his care (Gal. 2:7; Tim. 1:11). This stewardship was a grave responsibility for him (1 Cor. 9:16,17). The sole motive of this missionary team was to please God, for they were accountable to Him. They made no attempt to please men in order to gain their favor (cf. Gal. 1:10). Pleasing God is a mark of Christian commitment.

God is the ultimate Judge who sees the inner motives of our hearts (Ps. 139:1-3; Heb. 4:12,13). He “trieth our hearts” (1 Thess. 2:4), meaning He examines our inner

thoughts and motives to show whether they are genuine. Paul rested his case with God, fully confident that He knew what men could not know.

5. What did Paul and his companions refrain from doing, even though they had a right to do so? (vs. 5,6)

The missionaries never used flattering words to gain influence with people for selfish purposes. The Thessalonians knew this to be true. Paul flatly denied ever using a "cloak of covetousness."

Paul and his coworkers did not disguise covetousness by pretending that they were not covetous. They were not greedy for what others had, whether money or whatever else they possessed (Luke 12:15; Eph. 5:3). God knew this to be true of them.

Further, they did not seek public praise from the Thessalonians or from any other individuals. They could have made demands for financial support as apostles of Christ (1 Thess. 2:9), but they refrained from insisting on personally benefiting from such an arrangement, fitting as it was (cf. Gal.6:6).

6. To what did Paul compare the gentle care given to the Thessalonians? (v. 7)

Unlike the proud, selfish, demanding behavior of the typical traveling teacher, Paul's life with the Thessalonians has been characterized by gentleness. This is not mere passivity, sitting back so that others can have first place, but positive concern and care for the new believers. The term *nurse* refers not to a medical caregiver but to a nursing mother. That term provides a keen image of love that forms a deep bond and gives of oneself for the good of the other. As Paul had worked through the day and stayed up nights to support himself and nurture the Thessalonians in their faith, he had been very much like a nursing mother with *her children*.

7. Why were the missionaries willing to give their very lives for the sake of the Thessalonians? (v. 8)? How did they support themselves (v. 9)?

Love shaped by the gospel is never just a matter of feeling. It always translates into action. The missionaries had such a yearning love for the Thessalonians that they were willing to give not only the gospel but also their very lives for them (1 Thess. 2:8). "Affectionately desirous" is a single word in Greek, and it refers to a close attachment to someone. Paul and his companions were willing to give their "own souls," that is their very lives, for their converts. The Thessalonian Christians are beloved to them, as *dear* and precious as the closest family member.

Paul now cites an obvious demonstration of his love for the Thessalonians: he supported himself by working as a tentmaker rather than accepting money for preaching to them (v. 9). Paul will later explain in 1 Corinthians 9:1-18 his practice of self-support. There he asserts that he has the right to expect to be paid for his preaching, no less because he is an apostle of Christ. However, he willingly surrenders that right so that his support will not be a burden for those to whom he preaches or an impediment to their listening to *the gospel*. It is a practice that imitates Christ's own loving self-sacrifice.

Testimony of the Ministry (1 Thess. 2:10-12)

8. How did Paul summarize the missionaries' behavior among the Thessalonians? (v. 10)

The minister's behavior was not just an expression of their lives before God. It also provided the example that shaped the lives of the Thessalonians. It is often said that the gospel is better "caught" than taught. Paul demonstrates that truth in this section.

Paul describes their example as holy, demonstrating proper reverence for almighty God. It was just, reflecting adherence to God's standards of right and wrong. And it was blameless, consistent in a way that left them above criticism.

Again Paul appeals to the witness of God, his final witness of their character and integrity. But he also reminds the readers that they are his *witnesses* as well. The missionaries deliberately lived such lives before them so that they could both hear and see what the gospel is all about.

9. What did the fatherly care of the new believers include? (v. 11)

Having previously compared themselves with a nursing mother (v. 7), Paul now compares them with *a father* counseling *his children*. He says we *exhorted* them, a term that stresses urging on toward a goal, in this case a righteous life. They had *comforted* them, implying fatherly consolation in difficult times. With the word *charged* Paul expresses that his teaching had been urgent and insistent.

Stressing that they had acted this way toward *every one of you*, Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians of their individual attention and concern for them. Just as a good father treats his children as unique individuals, so the ministers deal with new Christians as unique individuals.

10. What does it mean to walk worthily of the Lord (1 Thess. 2:12)?

Just as Paul's life has been forever changed by the good news, so now have the Thessalonian Christians' lives been changed in the same way. Paul's teaching and witness are aimed at transforming their *walk*, that is, the way that they live in the world moment by moment.

The standard of their new life is to be *worthy of God*. In a very obvious sense, this is impossible, of course. No sinful human can ever be worthy of the holy God. But Paul here and elsewhere calls on Christians to live or walk in a manner worthy of God and the gospel (Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10). His point is to urge Christians to conform their lives to the character of God as revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we know God as the God who entered the world as a human being to die for unworthy, rebellious sinners, we are compelled to submit to His authority and become conformed to His image. We want to grow in Christlikeness in response to the wonderful gift we have received.

That is Paul's point as he reminds his readers that they have been *called* into God's *kingdom and glory*. The kingdom of God in the New Testament is God's reign or rule. Jesus taught His followers that God's kingdom was already breaking into the world because He was present (Matthew 12:28) but would not be fully realized until His return (Matthew 25:34). In the meantime, followers of Jesus experience already the blessings of God's kingdom even while they suffer the hardships and indignities of this present, evil age. Paul reminds the readers of this key teaching in this verse. The God to whom they belong has made them subjects of His glorious kingdom, in which they already experience the peace, unity, and contentment of living under God's rule.

Paul went on to say (in 1 Thess. 2:13) that they have accepted his teaching as not just his but God's. That *word* is not an abstract message but something that is now actively at work in them, empowering and changing their lives as they put their confidence in the gospel message.

Practical Points

1. We must be bold in speaking the gospel, for it always brings opposition (1 Thess. 2:1,2).
2. We must be sure our motive in ministry is always to please God (vs. 3,4).
3. We must be careful that our message is not perceived as benefiting us (vs. 5,6).
4. Unbelievers are not enemies to be converted but souls to be loved (vs. 7,8).
5. How we behave is far more important than how eloquently we speak (vs. 9,10).
6. We cannot expect others to walk worthy of God if we do not do so (vs. 11,12).

Conclusion

In recent years Christianity has been plagued with scandals. The media have repeatedly drawn attention to prominent Christians whose lives have not matched their words. Beyond those notable cases, many of us have been personally disappointed by Christians who have professed one thing and lived another. Worst of all, sometimes the Christians who disappoint us are ourselves.

This passage reminds us that such failure is not inevitable. It is not even normal. When the gospel takes hold in a life, as it did in Paul's life, the person is forever changed. Our focus is taken off of ourselves and placed on the God who saved us with His amazing grace. We center our lives on reflecting His sacrifice in Christ in the way that we live with humility and love for others. Lives like that show us that the gospel is more than a good sales pitch. It is "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16), a salvation that we can see in transformed lives.

Prayer

Gracious Father, we want our lives to be fitting reflections of Your love. We submit ourselves to Your transforming power, that by Your grace we can please You with our lives. In Jesus' name, amen!

Thought to Remember

“Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1,2).

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Circumstances prevented Paul from visiting the Thessalonian believers, but he sent Timothy to see how they were doing. He was delighted when Timothy returned with a good report, and he hoped to get back to them soon. This shows that a rich reward of Christian service is spiritual advancement by those who come to Christ. Study 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13, **“Sustained Through Encouragement.”**

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