

GLORY AND JOY AT CHRIST'S COMING

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First, let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

The first three chapters of 1 Thessalonians are intensely personal. In the first chapter Paul had expressed an overwhelming thankfulness for the believers in Thessalonica, which was the result of the report he had received from Timothy (3:6, 7). In chapters two and three this note of thanksgiving is continued but it is overshadowed by a definite tone of defense and personal vindication. In 2:1-16, Paul explains his motives and defends his ministry among them. In 2:17 - 3:13, Paul explains why he was unable to return to them while he expresses his strong yearning to see them again. This two-fold defense reflects a two-fold accusation that was levied against him by some. First, he was accused of preaching at Thessalonica for his own personal profit and not for their benefit. Second, he was accused of an insincere love for them so he did not plan to return to them. In 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 Paul begins his defense for not returning to this church. He expresses his strong longing to return to them, but every attempt he made was thwarted by Satan. He assures them of his love because they are his hope and joy and crown of rejoicing when Jesus Christ returns.

I. The Description of Paul's Ministry – 2:1, 2

2:1 – "Not in vain" - Paul (and his companions) ministered successfully in Thessalonica; it was very fruitful. Even though he and the other missionaries were mistreated by the city as a whole, there were many converts won to Christ as a result of their ministry. Furthermore, these converts stood true to Christ in the midst of severe trials (cf. 3:5-8).

2:2 – "Shamefully entreated" - These two words come from a single Greek word that means "to treat in an arrogant, spiteful manner, to scoff at, mistreat, insult." The word implies a sense of great personal insult or indignity. This happened at Philippi where he and Silas had been beaten publicly and cast into prison without a trial for casting a demon out of a young woman (Acts 16:14-24). This described Paul's ministry wherever he proclaimed the Gospel.

"Was bold in our God" – Even though he was mistreated in Philippi, Paul boldly declared the Gospel in Thessalonica by the courage God gave him and he was viciously attacked by the unbelieving Jews.

II. The Defense of Paul's Ministry – 2:3-16

A. His Message Was Honest – 2:3

2:3 – "Not of deceit" - "Deceit" literally means "wandering and roaming" and it came to be applied to wandering from the path of truth, to be in error. "Of" literally is "out of." The charge was not so much that Paul was actively engaged in deceiving people, but that he himself was deceived because his sources were erroneous. Therefore, he was propagating error. Paul denies this charge and reaffirms that his message was not a product of deception.

"Nor of uncleanness" – This is affirming that his ministry did not stem from any unclean purpose. He was pure of selfish motives.

"Nor in guile" – This speaks of the overall atmosphere in which Paul's ministry was carried out. The term "guile" originally referred to the use of bait to ensnare a fish. Traveling teachers and profiteers in Paul's day would resort to any and all means to attract a crowd and carry off their ill-gotten gains. Paul did not use any of this type of trickery in his ministry.

B. His Motives Were Pure – 2:4-6

2:4 – "Allowed" - Approved. He was not motivated by popularity, but sought the approval of God, who was testing him.

"To be put in trust" – Commissioned. Having been entrusted or commissioned by God with the stewardship of the Gospel, he looked to God for approval and not to men.

"So we speak" – "So" indicates Paul and his fellow missionaries knew they had been tested and commissioned by God, and "so" they determined to be obedient to God's assignment. "Speak" is in the present tense which indicates they were continually preaching with a consciousness of their high commission, seeking to please God.

"Tries our hearts" – Paul states that he and his companions were continually being tested by God to the very depths of their lives. This testing was not superficial, but very thorough. God wanted the best from those that He had commissioned for spreading the Gospel among lost men and women in Gentile lands.

2:5 – "Flattering words" - It speaks of a smooth-tongued oratory that flattered its audiences for the sake of self-interest. Paul and the other missionaries did not do this.

"Cloak of covetousness" – This speaks of a pretext to mask the real motive - greed. This word is used in Philippians 1:18 of those who preached Christ in pretense. Paul was not guilty of this either. He even calls God to be his witness, the very One who examines men's hearts (v. 4).

2:6 – "Glory" - Most likely carried the connotation of "esteem." Paul did not seek the esteem of them or of others.

"Burdensome" – In this context it carried the idea of "a burden of authority." Paul did not "throw his weight around" as he ministered among them to demand their respect.

"Apostles" – Is used in the general sense of "messengers," and it applied to Paul, Silas, and Timothy. For other uses of this word in a general sense see 1 Corinthians 8:23 and Philippians 2:25.

C. His Manner was Unblemished – 2:7-12

2:7-8 – He exemplified loving compassion. Paul expressed his endearment for the Thessalonian believers in four ways.

"Gentle" – Paul compared himself to a nursing mother who tenderly cares for her children. The word "cherish" carries the picture of a mother who covers her young with her body to warm and protect them.

"Being affectionately desirous of you" – Paul expressed a strong love and longing for these believers.

"We were willing to have imparted unto you . . . our own souls" – "Willing" pictures a "hearty and spontaneous impulse." Paul and his companions did not preach a cold message, but a message that was spiritually warm. It included their souls. The word "soul" speaks of the innermost being of a man; it was the seat and center of his life. Compare Phil 2:17.

"Because you were dear unto us" – The word "dear" is actually "beloved" and it often is a term specifically used for a favorite or only child. See Matt 3:17; 17:5.

2:9 – He exemplified tireless self-sacrifice.

"Labor and travail" – "Labor" speaks of the toil which brings about fatigue, i.e., "wear and tear." "Travail" speaks of the struggle it takes to overcome difficult circumstances. The two words together describe the effort Paul and his companions exerted, even to the point of utter exhaustion.

"Laboring night and day" – Paul supported himself in addition to preaching the Gospel.

"Not be chargeable" – He paid for his own expenses so that no one might charge him with preaching the Gospel for personal gain. He refused to be a burden to them.

2:10-12 – He exemplified and encouraged blameless living.

"Devoutly . . . justly . . . unblameably" – His example combined religious devotion with moral steadfastness to put together a blameless walk before God.

"Exhorted . . . everyone" – He spoke to each and every believer. He did it with the same concern that a father has for his own children.

"Exhorted . . . comforted . . . charged" – Paul appealed to their minds by exhorting them, to their emotions by comforting them, and to their wills by charging them. It was a thorough communication of his message to them.

"Walk worthy" – His goal was to have his converts conduct themselves in a manner befitting a Christian. Compare Eph. 4:1. This should be the goal of every minister and missionary for their church members and converts (Col. 2:2-8).

D. His Ministry Was Fruitful – 2:13-16

The character of those that responded resembled the message Paul preached.

2:13 – "Word of God" - Paul reminds them that the word which he preached was God's Word. Therefore, the word which the Thessalonians received was indeed the Word of God, and not the word of men.

"Received . . . received" – These are two different words in the Greek. The second word says they welcomed God's Word.

"Effectually works" – Paul describes the effectual power of God's Word. When they received the preaching of Paul they received the Word of God which effectively energized their life to do God's work. Actually, it is the Spirit of God that takes the Word of God to do the work of God (Phil 2:13). The verb "works" is actually passive in the Greek and could be translated, "which sets in operation." The Word itself does not perform some mystical operation, but it is the Holy Spirit's application of the Word to their hearts that does the work that God desires in believers.

2:14 – The Christians in Thessalonica became "followers" (imitators) of the Judean churches, because they also suffered persecution from their countrymen for Christ's sake.

2:15-16 – This is not to be regarded as an emotional tirade that Paul unleashed against his Jewish persecutors but rather it is a careful and reasoned indictment of them. Paul carefully described their habitual, hard-heartedness and proved that their present activities in hindering the Gospel are consistent with that pattern. They have placed themselves as objects of God's wrath.

III. Defense of Paul's Absence – 2:17-20

Paul begins his defense for not returning to visit them. His defense will continue in 3:1-13.

2:17 – "Being taken from you" - Literally means "orphaned." It is a term used to express the loss of someone very close.

2:18 – "Hindering" - The word literally means "to cut into." It was used of an enemy force cutting up a road so as to make it impassable. Satan was doing that to Paul so he could not visit these converts.

2:19-20 – Paul explains why he was so intensely interested in them: they were his hope, joy, crown of rejoicing and glory. They were the trophies that he would present to Christ at His coming. His words, "Well done, good and faithful servant," was the greatest reward he could receive.