

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 – “Marks of a Worthy Walk”

It's been probably close to a year that Paul has been absent from the believers in Thessalonica. It's a time where false teachers have come in and tried to discredit Paul. This was a continuing problem in the early church that Paul had to write often to defend. So called ministers claiming to be sent from God would make their way from city to city trying to profit off this new way and teaching about Jesus Christ. These false teachers tried to get these new Christians to partner with them in their work and they would end up profiting off the good will of the people. Of course they had to make sure that the church didn't listen to Paul and to his warnings, so these false teachers would say that Paul is the problem. He's the guy you can't trust.

So in Chapter 2 Paul responds by reminding the Thessalonian believers that the proof of his integrity or authenticity is his life that was on display before them. They've all seen him living out his faith. There doesn't seem to be a deceptive bone in his body.

- And that really is the key to living a life that honors God and represents God. We've got so much phoniness out there that people are desiring to simply see authenticity and integrity – especially from church leaders. We just want people to be real.
- It reminds me of the story of an out of work actor named Daniel. He was so down and out that he was ready to accept any acting part that came along. One day he saw an advertisement in the paper: ACTOR NEEDED TO PLAY A GORILLA. "I could do that," Daniel thought. Daniel arranged an interview. The employer turned out to be the local zoo. The zoo had spent too much money renovating the grounds and improving the habitat that they couldn't afford to have a live gorilla at the moment. So, until they could get more funding, they decided to use an actor in a gorilla suit. Needing the money, Daniel took the job. At first, he felt not only dishonest by fooling the visitors to the zoo, but also undignified in the ape suit. But after a few days on the job, he began to be amused by all the attention and started to put on a show for the spectators. He was hanging upside-down from the branches, swinging on vines, climbing up cage walls and roaring while beating his chest. Soon, Daniel was drawing a sizable crowd. One day, when Daniel was swinging on a vine to show off to some children, his hand slipped and he went flying over the wall into the lion's den. He panicked. There was a huge lion not twenty feet away, and it looked very hungry. So Daniel started jumping up and down in his gorilla

suit, screaming and yelling, "Help, help! Get me out of here! I'm not really a gorilla! I'm a man in a gorilla suit! Heeellp!" The lion quickly pounced on Daniel, held him down and said, "Will you SHUT UP! You're going to get us both fired!!!"

- Integrity and Authenticity is vital for the Christian. What we are is much more important than anything we say. It doesn't work that way for most other occupations (like playing a gorilla in a zoo). But for the Christian, if you lose your character, you've pretty much lost all.
- Chuck Colson said: "The three most important ingredients in Christian work are integrity, integrity, integrity."

So Paul holds up his life as an example of walking in integrity and authenticity – despite the attacks against him. He knew he was walking worthy before God, and he encourages the believers in Thessalonica to walk worthy of God themselves.

Summary Statement:

In this passage, Paul recounts his ministry among the Thessalonians, emphasizing the authenticity of his message and the character of his conduct. He highlights the importance of sharing the gospel with sincerity, submissiveness, and sacrifice, serving as an example to the believers.

As we go through these 12 verses, we're going to highlight 10 points that make for an authentic and integral minister of the gospel.

1. Sincere Service – 2:1-4

2:1 - *For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.*

1. The servant of God ministers with purpose – 2:1

Paul reminds these Thessalonian believers that coming to them was not in vain. Paul's not on some random, pointless trip just trying to find a nice place to vacation. He came to them purposefully, on mission. And he lived out that mission. Though it was cut short the gospel was preached, lives were saved, a church was started.

- This word vain means empty, lacking in results, to be without effect. And we know that Paul's visit to Thessalonica was anything but. The people in

Thessalonians know Paul's visit was not in vain because lives have been transformed.

Paul's making this point so nobody would discourage the church and discredit Paul by saying he ditched you after a short time; that his work didn't really have any effect. Paul says ***you yourselves know***.

In fact, Paul will remind the Thessalonians 6 times in this passage of their own observations and experiences with him.

- *You yourselves know...* 2:1
- *And were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know...* 2:2
- *Neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know...* 2:5
- *For you remember, brethren...* 2:9
- *You are witnesses...* 2:10
- *As you know how we exhorted...* 2:11

He's not telling them anything new. He's not trying to say, *Guys, I didn't really reveal the real me when I was with you. Let me tell you who I really am*. No, he's showing them, in light of the attempts to discredit him, that they have already seen who he is. He doesn't need to try and prove himself to them. He's already proven himself by how he's lived in front of them. And they're already witnesses of this life of integrity. In other words, they shouldn't believe the lies of the false teachers, they should believe the life that Paul lived authentically before them.

- May we live lives where we're not having to try to backpedal and say we're really not that kind of person. Let's let our actions and conduct of life be at the point where if someone tries to say something negative about you, you're already confident that nobody will believe it because of the witness you've already left.

2:2 - But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

2. The servant of God ministers boldly – 2:2

If Paul's gospel was untrue, would he have been willing to suffer, be beaten and thrown in prison when he was in Philippi? He brings this up to show that he came to them after experiencing these things and was ready to continue on preaching the same gospel because he knew it was true and it was the power of God to salvation (Romans 1:16).

He didn't tone it down. He didn't go undercover. He didn't back down. He preached boldly. And notice they ***were bold in our God.***

- A minister of God doesn't shrink back because conditions may be less than desirable. He puts his faith in God, he serves God, and is bold in God knowing the gospel changes lives and it's worth getting it out.

2:3 - *For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.*

3. The servant of God ministers purely – 2:3

As these missionaries came to Thessalonica, they didn't come with any impure motives. They weren't giving out a gospel that they knew was false, or they weren't exaggerating on its truths. They came without error. It was true to its core. They came without uncleanness and deceit. This was the pure unadulterated gospel by which their exhortation could bring real comfort and hope.

- These missionaries possessed a purity of content in their message, and a purity of heart in their motives.

2:4 - *But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.*

4. The servant of God ministers to please God, not men – 2:4

A couple words stand out here. Paul and his companions have been ***approved***. This is the idea of metal going through the fire to be tested and tried. Paul, Silas and Timothy have been proven and qualified through divine testing. And now they're ***entrusted*** with the gospel. God's given them the privilege of being ambassadors for Him. Paul was a steward of the gospel. He was like a servant in the household given the job of managing his master's affairs.

Paul recognized this great call and trust and so his desire was to please God and not men. Paul was never in the business of trying to win people over by watering down the gospel.

- "In fact, when your preaching makes people want to stone you, beat you, and throw you in prison, it quickly becomes obvious that you are not a

clever salesman trying to tickle people's ears. Paul was interested in one audience only—God.”¹

- **Galatians 1:10**, *"For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ."*

Sadly, some churches today don't want to address certain topics for fear of offending people. That walks right into this issue of pleasing people over God. We certainly don't want to try and offend people, but when we teach the whole Bible there's going to be things that are convicting, you could say offensive. But it's only offensive if you're trying to hold on to your life and make the gospel fit with your lifestyle. Lay yourself down and you won't be offended.

We must please God first and foremost. And He knows our hearts and **tests our hearts**. This word *test* is the same as *approved*.

2. Submissive Service – 2:5-8

2:5 - *For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.*

5. The servant of God ministers with no desire for personal gain – 2:5

Paul and his friends didn't come to Thessalonica heaping false praise on people as a way to win them over deceptively. Flattery comes across like you're building the other person up when it's really about making yourself look good and be liked. Some will do this with ulterior motives – it's a **cloak of covetousness**, or a pretext for greed. Greed isn't just about wanting more; it's about wanting more and more and more... When is it enough? It's never enough with greed at the helm.

Paul is stating that he wasn't in this for himself. He's not looking to get anything out of it for himself. His reward is heavenward.

- May we serve the Lord without the pretext of greed or personal gain.
- Many false teachers are doing that today. They use the gospel and their "ministry position" for personal gain. Beware of such people.

¹ Evans, T. (2019). *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (p. 1261). Holman Bible Publishers.

2:6 - *Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.*

6. The servant of God ministers with no desire for personal glory – 2:6

There was no attempt to pull out the apostle card and heap up the praise and accolades. Nor did they use their apostleship to make demands on people to do what they asked. They weren't looking for any glory for themselves. They were serving God and that was more than good enough for them.

- Are you doing what you do for the Lord? Or are you hoping to be seen and acknowledged? Perhaps receive a few accolades along the way?
- **Colossians 3:17**, *"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."*
- One way to know if you're truly serving God and not seeking the glory is to see how you respond when nobody thanks you or acknowledges you for the service you did.
- Do it all unto the Lord. He knows and sees and tests the hearts (2:4).

2:7-8 - *But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. ⁸ So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.*

7. The servant of God ministers in gentleness – 2:7-8

Again, Paul didn't come in demanding respect, or people to serve him. He came to give his life for others. And he did so in gentleness, like a nursing mother who cherishes her own children.

- I've been able to witness this firsthand once again with my new grandson. And when he's in need, if he's hungry and crying, my daughter can't just say, *'Be quiet, I'm tired. I need a little me time right now.'* No way, she lays her life down for that child. His needs come before hers. She doesn't aggressively try to shut him up but gently attends to him in love.
- This is how these missionaries responded to these Thessalonians. They gave of their own lives, laying down their needs for the sake of others.

3. Sacrificial Service – 2:9-12

2:9 - *For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.*

8. The servant of God ministers tirelessly – 2:9

The gospel was not something they did to make a living, it's what they were living for. Whatever it took to get the gospel out is what they did. If that meant working to support themselves, as is being implied in this verse, then that's what they did. Paul did this in Corinth as well to not be a burden to anyone (1 Cor. 9).

- It was an accepted cultural practice that as a preacher or philosopher came through town to teach others, they would be compensated for their time. Paul could have easily accepted this. (This is what many false teachers took advantage of). But Paul relinquished this right to set an example for this church.
- He worked hard and lived out the very principles he passed on to this church.
- A leader whose actions match their message provide great motivation for others.

2:10 - *You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;*

9. The servant of God ministers blamelessly – 2:10

Again, Paul didn't just talk the talk, he walked the walk. He behaved blamelessly. This doesn't mean that Paul was perfect. But that he lived in way that you couldn't easily accuse Paul of wrongdoing. If something went missing, your first thought was not, Paul probably took it.

- Our behavior is a huge witness and yet it's one that can often be overlooked. I've been with Christian leaders and pastors, who act rude or self-entitled. They think what they say on a Sunday is good enough. But what is said on a Sunday lacks the conviction when it's not lived out by the person speaking it.

2:11-12 - *as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, ¹² that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

10. The servant of God ministers by exhorting – 2:11

This word **exhorted** is the Greek word *parakaleo*. It means to call to one's side with comfort and instruction. He likens it to a father who lovingly instructs his children in the right way.

And what was this exhortation and instruction? To **walk worthy of God**... That word worthy is the Greek word *axios*, and it means comparable. Like a scale. Paul is exhorting them to look at everything that God is to you, and all He has done for you, and live a life that will be in balance with that. Jesus has given His life for you, so live your life worthy of that. Well never be able to live in a way that makes up for what Jesus has done, but live where your life is reflecting His great love, mercy, and grace. Let your life balance out these things shown to you.

And we should desire to walk worthy of God all the more when we see that He has a special calling on us to live in eternity with Him. He calls us into **His own kingdom and glory**. That is a future reality, but also a present promise. We are to be like Him in the here and now and reflect the glory of our God. He gives us His Holy Spirit to enable us to live this life worthy of Him.

Points to Ponder:

1. Live sincerely – let your faith be real and recognizable.
2. Serve selflessly – seek God's approval, not man's applause.
3. Walk steadfastly – may your life back up your message.