
The Thessalonian Letters

Paul Defends His Ministry

1 Thessalonians 2:1-20



Steve Lewis

www.SpiritAndTruth.org

Our coming to you was not in vain (2:1)

- “You yourselves **know**” (*oida*) ~ to know by observation. He again addressed them as “**brethren**,” which expressed the close family connection they now have in Christ.
- “**coming**” (*eisodos*) ~ the same Greek word that was translated “reception” in 1:9. It involves the act of entering or beginning some activity.
- The Thessalonian believers had ample opportunity to see the missionary team in action.
- “**not in vain**” (*kenos*) ~ literally, “empty” (fruitless or without effect). The Thessalonians could testify that the ministry in Thessalonica had been full, fruitful, and successful.

Proof positive of the sincerity of his ministry (2:2)

- **"We had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi"** ~ the Thessalonians had probably seen the fresh wounds on the backs of Paul and Silas when they arrived in Thessalonica a few days after the beating and imprisonment at Philippi.
- **"mistreated"** (*hubrizō*) ~ the insults, abuse, shameful treatment, and personal indignity they had endured.
- **"We had the boldness in our God to speak to you"** ~ Paul knew that preaching the gospel carried the possibility of dangerous or life-threatening consequences. Yet he would speak out again even if it resulted in another beating or even stoning. A huckster or scammer would never do that.

No error, impurity, or deceit (2:3)

- Paul will call upon God to be the witness of the purity of his motives.
- **“our exhortation”** (*paraklēsis*) ~ literally, “calling alongside” for the purpose of comfort, consolation, and support. This is not the approach of a deceiver or scammer.
- **“error”** (*planē*) ~ being led astray, and it included the idea that Paul himself might have been deceived about the truth.
- **“impurity”** (*akatharsia*) ~ polluted by filth (physical or moral).
- **“deceit”** (*dolos*) ~ pictures someone baiting a trap in order to catch others through trickery.

God examines our hearts (2:4)

- “**approved**” (*dokimazō*) ~ to be examined and confirmed by testing.
- “**God**” continually tests and evaluates. Greek present tense
- God is the witness who validates and testifies to the faithfulness and trustworthiness of Paul and his companions for the task of proclaiming the gospel.
- “**not as pleasing men**” (*areskō*) ~ to seek the favor of others or to accommodate to their preferences and desires. People-pleasing can cause a person to twist or bend the truth, but Paul and his companions never did this.
- Paul spoke only to please “**God who examines our hearts**” (*dokimazō*)

No motive for greed or glory (2:5-6)

- “**flattering**” (*kolax*) ~ currying favor by expressing false humility or deference in a subservient manner. This was a common characteristic of the traveling charlatans who would defraud people for personal gain.
- The Thessalonians were eyewitnesses who could testify in Paul’s defense.
- “**pretext**” (*prophasis*) ~ something put on as a false front to cover the true state of things behind it. “**greed**” (*pleonexia*) ~ simply the desire for more.
- “**glory from men**” (*doxa*) ~ approval, honor, praise, prestige, or status.
- “**we might have asserted our authority**” ~ they had legitimate apostolic rights and authority as designated representatives of Christ, but they chose to defer their rights.

Gentle care and fond affection (2:7-8)

- “we became **gentle** in your midst” (*ēpios*) ~ tender and warm-hearted in temperament, as a nursing mother with her children.
- “**fond affection**” (*homeiromai*) ~ a term of endearment describing the tender activities of the nursery.
- “**well pleased**” (*eudokeō*) ~ giving great satisfaction and pleasure.
- They not only brought them the “**gospel of God**” but also shared their “**own lives**” with the believers in Thessalonica.
- “**very dear**” (*agapētos*) ~ from the Greek word *agapē* which captures the highest form of unselfish, self-sacrificing love for others.

Working night and day (2:9)

- It was Paul's habitual practice to support himself by working at his trade as a tentmaker (see Acts 18:3; 20:34; 1 Cor 4:12; 2 Thess 3:8).
- His primary reason: "**so as not to be a burden to any of you.**" But it also avoided any possible accusation that he was presenting the gospel for financial gain.
- This made Paul's ministry much more difficult than it otherwise would have been. "**labor**" (*kopos*) ~ the same word Paul used in 1:3 involving fatigue, struggle, and weariness. "**hardship**" (*mochthos*) expresses the physical toll it took on Paul, working to the point of exhaustion to earn a living while at the same time ministering full time to the new believers.

Behaving devoutly, uprightly, and blamelessly (2:10-12)

- The Thessalonians and God Himself were Paul's character witnesses.
- A father's care for his own children:
 - “**exhorting**” (*parakaleō*) ~ to call near for the purpose of exhortation and support.
 - “**encouraging**” (*paramutheomai*) ~ gently soothing or consoling.
 - “**imploring**” (*martyromai*) ~ solemnly declaring the truth.
- The goal of a father's involvement in the lives of his children is that they would “**walk in a worthy manner.**”
- God's continual “**calling**” (*kaleō*) in the life of believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit has a future direction and goal, which is the “**kingdom and glory**” of the Messiah. The Lord is coming **for** His saints (1:10), then after their glorification Christ will return **with** His saints to inaugurate His earthly kingdom in glory.

The gospel is the Word of God (2:13)

- Here Paul continued his appreciation for the Thessalonians. “**For this reason**” connects his gratitude to all the circumstances he had just discussed. Despite opposition they received the Word of God.
- “**Received**” (*paralambanō*) ~ literally, to take to one’s side or bring close. The Thessalonians had “**heard**” Paul’s words but they accepted them as from God. Paul never preached a man-made message.
- Not only received, but “**accepted**” (*dechomai*) ~ to welcome favorably, embrace, and make something one’s own.
- Truly the Word of God ~ “**as it really is**” (*alēthōs*) ~ true, real, certain. And active ~ “**performs its work**” (*energeō*) ~ changing believers’ lives.

Judgment on hostile unbelieving Jews (2:14-16)

- The Thessalonians became unwilling “**imitators**” (*mimētēs*) of the persecuted believers in the churches of Judea.
- The unbelieving Jews were no longer seeking to follow their God (“**they are not pleasing to God**”) and therefore would not find favor with Him.
- “**Hindering**” (*kōluō*) ~ forbidding, preventing, or refusing to allow something. In this case the unbelieving Jews were hindering the salvation of the Gentiles.
- They “**fill up the measure**” of their sins , and God’s “**wrath**” (*orgē*) comes on them “**to the utmost**” (*telos*) ~ reaching its climax or extreme limit so that God’s judgment is inevitable.

Separation makes the heart grow fonder (2:17-18)

- Paul returned to his previous train of thought (2:14) by sharing how he felt upon being separated from the Thessalonians.
- “**having been taken away**” (*aporphanizō*) ~ literally “orphaned away from.” The physical separation in no way meant that their “**spirit**” (literally “heart”) was separated from their beloved spiritual children, but it made him even more eager to see them face-to-face.
- “**Satan hindered us**” ~ Paul could clearly distinguish between Satan’s hindrances and God’s direction (see Acts 16:6-7). Even though spiritual opposition is real, God’s will and plan can never be hindered.

They represent Paul's heavenly reward (2:19-20)

- Three things the Thessalonians represent to Paul:
 - His **hope** ~ the expectation of future fellowship and blessing.
 - His **joy** ~ the cause or occasion for present and future joy.
 - His **crowning achievement** ~ literally, “crown of boasting” or victory, proving that he had been faithful to his commission from Christ.
- The salvation of the Thessalonians was his hope for future blessing. It was evidence that he would be rewarded at the *Judgment Seat of Christ* (2 Cor 5:10).
- **“in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming”** ~ Paul focuses on the future; he eagerly hopes and joyfully anticipates the approval and commendation of his Savior.