

Integrity in Christian Ministry

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Date: 31 October 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bibles and to the New Testament, to Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. Edward Lobb has been getting us into this the last couple of weeks, and we've come now to chapter 2.

And we're going to read not all, but most of chapter 2 down to the paragraph ending at verse 16. And it's a very robust, very pertinent passage about the nature of real Christian ministry and integrity in it.

Paul says to the infant church at Thessalonica, he says, You know yourselves, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we'd already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive. But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God, who tests our hearts.

For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed. God is our witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others.

[1 : 41] Though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ, we were gentle among you. Like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. And so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves.

Because you've become very dear to us. But you remember, brothers, our labor and toil. We worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaim to you the gospel of God.

You are witnesses, and God also. How holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct towards you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you, encouraged you, and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

And we also thank God constantly for this. When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displeased God and opposed all mankind, by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved.

[3 : 28] And so, as always, fill up the measure of their sins. But, God's wrath has come upon them at last.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, good evening, friends. Let's turn to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2.

And our subject for this evening is integrity in Christian ministry, as Paul writes about it here in the earlier part of chapter 2 in 1 Thessalonians.

And just a little bit of recapitulation first, let me remind you of the situation that Paul was involved in with this church at Thessalonica in northern Greece, so that we can better understand what he's saying in this second chapter.

Paul and Silas and Timothy had spent only a few weeks preaching the gospel at Thessalonica, and then they had had to leave the city in a great hurry, under pressure, under cover of darkness.

[4 : 42] It was a very difficult situation for Paul. He would have loved to have been able to stay on at the city to teach these very young Christians and to get them more firmly established in their

faith.

But he had to move on, and he found himself a few weeks or possibly months later in Athens, desperate to have news of the young Thessalonian church.

Well, what did he do? Look with me at chapter 3, verse 1 for a moment. 3-1. Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, when we could bear no longer the lack of news from Thessalonica, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions.

So he sends Timothy, his right-hand man, to strengthen the young church because, look on to verse 5 here in chapter 3, he is fearful that the devil might have tempted the young Christians to abandon their faith and his labor would then prove to have been in vain.

But, what happens? Chapter 3, verse 6, Timothy has returned, bringing a really encouraging report, how they are full of faith and love, how they remember Paul's visit kindly, and how they long to see him again.

[6 : 07] And that report, brought by Timothy, has brought great comfort to Paul. As he says in chapter 3, verse 7, in all our distress and affliction, we have been comforted about you through your faith.

For now we live, we can breathe freely again, because we know that you are standing fast in the Lord. Now this report of Timothy's helps us to understand what Paul says in chapter 1.

If Paul knows, from Timothy's report, that the church is standing firm, he is able, in chapter 1, to give the Christians great reassurance that they really are Christians.

That's the kind of reassurance we all need sometimes. And we lingered last week on that powerful phrase in chapter 1, verse 4, we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you.

We know that you are indeed Christians. If your hearts are fluttering with uncertainty, set your hearts at rest. We know that God has chosen you because, chapter 1, verse 5, our gospel, when we preached it to you, was not just words to you, you received it with full conviction.

[7 : 17] It went home into your hearts in the power of the Holy Spirit. That's the sure demonstration that you belong to the Lord. And there are other things, Paul says in chapter 1, which certify your conversion.

Verse 3, your faith, your love, and your steadfast hope. The three hallmarks of true Christian life. And further, verse 6, your willingness to bear affliction.

Nobody who's not a Christian is willing to suffer affliction for their allegiance to Christ. And further, verse 9 and 10, you turned to God from idols.

You removed your pagan idols from your houses and from your hearts and you began to wait.

Verse 10, you adopted the characteristic position of real Christian faith.

You began to look to the great future. You began to wait for his return from heaven. You wouldn't have dreamt of waiting for the return of Jesus to deliver you from the coming wrath if you had not truly become Christians.

[8 : 17] Well, friends, if you were here last week, you'll realize I've just given a very brief summary of the ground we covered then. But Paul's big point in chapter 1 is to reassure these very young Christians that they really have been converted to Christ.

And I can only think that they read these words with great joy and said, yes, Paul, amen, Paul. This really has happened to us and your words have brought us great comfort and reassurance that God has truly chosen us and we really do belong to him.

Now, chapter 2 takes us in a new direction and we need to understand where Paul is going. His underlying aim in chapter 2 is just the same as his aim in chapter 1 and that is to reassure the Thessalonian Christians that they are truly Christians.

But Paul adopts a different tack in chapter 2 and here's the difference. In chapter 1 he's saying the gospel is true and you really are Christians because your changed lives demonstrate it.

But in chapter 2 he's saying the gospel is true and you really can trust it because our lives demonstrate it, my life and Silas's and Timothy's. So in chapter 1 the focus is on their lives, the Thessalonians' lives.

[9 : 39] But in chapter 2 the focus is on Paul's life and that of his fellow missionaries. And that is why in chapter 1 the dominant pronoun is you but in chapter 2 the dominant pronoun is we.

In verses 1 to 12 of chapter 2 Paul is writing about his own lifestyle. He's saying to the Thessalonians you can trust the truth of our message because we demonstrated integrity in our work and lifestyle when we were living with you.

So why should Paul need to write at some length about his work his methods and his motives? Why is he needing so it seems to justify himself?

Is he crowing? Is he blowing his own trumpet? Well surely not. Paul was not that kind of person. What he's doing here is defending himself because he has been forced to.

What has clearly been happening at Thessalonica has been some kind of smear campaign mounted against Paul by his opponents and they've been criticizing him sharply and for the because of this criticism and for the sake of these young Christians Paul is having to defend himself against the poisonous accusations of his critics.

[10:57] You see there must have been many fierce critics of Paul. Just think back to Act 17 which we looked at two weeks ago the chapter which records what happened when Paul first visited Thessalonica.

He caused uproar in the city. The Jews who refused his message angrily opposed him. They roused up a mob in the city. In the days before you could rouse up a mob through your mobile phone they managed to get them together.

The result was that a number of Christians were dragged before the city magistrates and the upshot was that Paul and Silas had to leave the city by night for their own security.

And it doesn't take much imagination to know what sort of things Paul's opponents would have been saying about Paul after he'd gone. He's a traitor to the faith of Abraham.

He's an opponent of Moses. A charlatan, a flatterer, a man pleaser. Don't you believe a word of that snake Paul? Now Paul knew that his critics would be saying these things about him and Silas.

[12:00] He'd been around the block many a time. He knew how fiercely Jewish people could criticize him when they set themselves against his gospel message. And, and this is the point, he knew that these criticisms directed against himself and Silas and Timothy might be undermining the determination of the Thessalonian Christians to keep going as Christians.

Criticism can have a drip-drip effect. So what is Paul doing in these first 12 verses of chapter 2? He's saying to the Thessalonians, our ministry among you was characterized by integrity, by love and compassion.

I know that our opponents will be bad-mouthing us in all kinds of ways, but brothers, these criticisms are not true as you well know.

Did you notice as the passage was read out loud that Paul several times says, you know, or as you know? He's appealing to their memory of his visit. Just look with me at the passage.

Verse 1, for you yourselves know, brothers. Verse 2, but although we'd already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know.

[13:19] Verse 5, we never came with words of flattery, as you know. Verse 9, you remember, brothers, our labor and toil.

Verse 10, you are witnesses and God also, how blameless our conduct was. Verse 11, for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted you.

It's very striking, isn't it? I can't think of another passage in his letters quite like it. So why does Paul write like this? He's saying to them, our opponents are besmirching our reputation with all kinds of criticisms, but you know that their criticisms of us are untrue because you observed our conduct and you understood our motives.

It was no time ago that we were with you. Your memory of our visit is very fresh, and your memory testifies against the wretched misrepresentations of our critics.

I remember first encountering this passage long ago and feeling rather uncomfortable about it. I found myself wishing that Paul didn't need to be so defensive. Part of me wanted to say to him, Paul, brother, relax.

[14:33] Be a bit more laid back about these criticisms. Let them be like water off a duck's back to you. Of course people are going to fire accusations at your work, but let them fire at you. The Lord is your helper, isn't he?

Can't you trust him to vindicate your work and take care of your reputation? But I had to take a longer and harder look at the passage, and then I began to realize why Paul felt it necessary to write like this.

You see, he's not defending himself primarily for the sake of his own reputation. At one level, he knows perfectly well that he's going to be called a traitor to Judaism and a religious revolutionary. As he puts it in 1 Corinthians, he knows that he and his fellow apostles will be called the scum of the earth. And at that level, he doesn't mind. After all, he knows that Jesus was called Beelzebub and mad and demon-possessed.

So he's not really concerned about his reputation as far as it has a bearing on him. But what he is concerned about is these young, tender Thessalonian Christians.

[15 : 42] If they hear Paul being called a charlatan and a deceiver and a religious troublemaker, and if they begin to believe that he is, then they're in danger of abandoning not only Paul, but Jesus also.

And that's what Paul cannot risk. That's why he defends himself and his work amongst them. He wants them to be able to trust his integrity so that they will fully trust the integrity of his message and the integrity of Jesus.

Paul and Jesus are inextricably bound up together. If the Thessalonians can't trust Paul, they won't trust Jesus. And incidentally, friends, it's just the same today.

If we are not prepared to trust Paul, whom Jesus commissioned as his mouthpiece and apostle, then we will end up at variance with Jesus. And that's no place for a Christian to be.

Those who depart from Paul will, in the end, depart from Jesus. All right, well, let's look more closely now at the text and see what it is about his work that Paul is defending here.

[16 : 52] And as we see the integrity of Paul's work, it will help us to see what gospel work ought to look like in every generation. Remember, Paul is our example.

Imitate me, he says, as I imitate Christ. So our subject this evening is the importance of integrity in gospel work and gospel ministry. And I want us to notice three things about the gospel work of Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

First, they were bold. They were not frightened off by suffering. This is what verse two is all about. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

Now, you'll see that verse is speaking of not one but two bouts of suffering, the first at Philippi and the second at Thessalonica. We followed the course of events at Philippi a fortnight ago, as they're told in Acts chapter 16, but let me briefly remind you of them.

Paul and Silas went there, preached the gospel. Various people, including Lydia, became Christians. But then there was trouble. Paul and Silas were beaten with rods in public at the orders of the town magistrates, although they'd not been tried or condemned in a court of law.

[18 : 19] They were then thrown into the town jail and their feet were fastened in the stocks. Then they were wonderfully released by divine intervention. The jailer there put his trust in Christ.

He washed their wounds. He fed them. But what did Paul and Silas then do? Well, they left Philippi, their backs terribly bruised, but they journeyed straight to Thessalonica and immediately started preaching again.

That is remarkable. No wonder Calvin writes of Paul's unconquerable mental courage and indefatigable endurance of the cross. It's not that he was never fearful.

He certainly was fearful at times. But real courage is the attitude that perseveres and finishes the work in the teeth of fear, not in the absence of fear.

So Paul says here in verse 2, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. Now that kind of boldness speaks of integrity.

[19 : 24] Charlatans and gold diggers don't behave like that. Luke, the doctor, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, he speaks of Paul's boldness in the very last verse of Acts, Acts 28, 31, where he writes that Paul remained in Rome for two years proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

So this word boldness is a word that Luke and Paul both used. It was clearly part and parcel of their mental framework. They knew that real gospel preaching required boldness.

But it's not that Paul awards himself any gold stars for bravery. Just look at the way he expresses it in verse 2. We had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel in the midst of much conflict.

He's not claiming that his boldness originates in himself. He's not like Sylvester Stallone in the Rocky films taking off his shirt and flexing up his muscles and saying, who's a big boy then?

No. He says, we had boldness in our God. The hatred and fierceness is flying at Paul from all directions, but he stands there and he keeps on preaching the gospel and drawing his strength and boldness from the great heavenly reservoir, not from the muddy puddle of his own heart.

[20 : 53] Now that is gospel ministry with integrity. And in God's providence, these words were written not only for the Thessalonians back then, but for us today to stiffen our spines and to show us how gospel work must be carried out.

Look at the end of verse 2 in the midst of much conflict. Now that's what it's like today. Conflict is our gospel preaching scenario in the 21st century.

If any of us, perhaps the older ones especially, have lingering thoughts, nostalgic thoughts of the peaceful old parish church nestling in the countryside in some pretty village in East Lothian or Gloucestershire with the rooks cawing in the trees and the click of bat on ball on the village green on the Saturday afternoon.

Four runs. Well done, Charlie. Now those old village churches, they're lovely, but we must allow them to dream on.

Paul is batting on a different wicket. He's facing hostile pace bowling, and we need to join him out in the middle. Boldness in the midst of conflict.

[22 : 16] Now you might be thinking, come on, Edward, surely this teaching is for ministers and leaders, not for the foot soldiers of the Christian church. This surely is material to be taught at ministers' conferences.

It's not needed, surely, by the ordinary Sunday congregation. Well, friend, if that's what you're thinking, hold your horse. Who was this letter written to? Look back to chapter 1, verse 1.

It's not written to the leaders of the church at Thessalonica. It's written to the church, all its members. Chapter 2 here is for Granny Jacobs and Grandpa Solomons and Auntie Rachel at number 39, as well as for the pastors and elders.

So why does the whole church need to read this teaching? The answer is because we're all involved in the conflict between gospel truth and the devil's deceptions.

Now, it is also true in chapter 2 that Paul is specifically writing about his integrity as a church leader, as a preacher and evangelist. But the whole church needs to know what gospel ministry with integrity looks like.

[23 : 25] We need all of us to be able to distinguish between good faithful leadership and fraudulent leadership. And there's too much of that about these days. If we can see from Paul's example that boldness in the midst of conflict is required, we can pray for our leaders, asking the Lord to help them to live like this.

We can support and encourage our leaders, particularly when they're fighting battles for truth. And when it comes to selecting future leaders, identifying those in our midst, younger people who have the potential to be preachers and ministers, we shall realize that it's not simply talent that we're looking for.

We're also looking for the willingness to be bold in situations of conflict. That is a matter of character, not just of gifts. Bold leadership puts heart into a congregation.

Where there's bold leadership, the congregation grows in confidence and joy. Whereas timid and fearful leadership will make others shrink back and be fearful themselves. The situation that we're facing today calls for boldness in leadership and preaching.

It was headline news just two days ago, I think it was on Friday, that Pope Francis is saying that the COP26 conference is the thing that is providing the world with hope.

[24 : 55] I would encourage the Pope to read the Bible and he might find that there is a greater and more lasting hope to proclaim to the world. The Church of England, which I spring from, is investing great energy in the climate change conference.

All the cathedrals in England, those wonderful big cathedrals up and down the country yesterday, were clanging their bells for 20 or 30 minutes to highlight the great source of hope that centers upon Glasgow in the next fortnight.

It takes boldness for a church leader to say, no. The source of our hope is not in a climate change conference, but in Christ crucified.

The pressure on the churches is simply to endorse the world's agenda and thus to be part of the world. Boldness, like Paul's boldness, is needed. Those who are willing to say that our hope is in Christ crucified risk vilification.

Paul paid heavily for his boldness. He was beaten, he was stoned, he was imprisoned, eventually beheaded. We have to decide whose side we're on.

[26 : 12] The Thessalonians suffered for their adherence to Paul's teaching, but those who insist that our hope is in the world to come are blessed by God.

Well, there's the first thing, boldness in the midst of conflict. Now, secondly, Paul is saying to the Thessalonians, we were straightforward preachers, not flatterers, not men pleasers. And this is his subject from verses 3 to 6. And if you look over that section, you'll see that it's full of denials. Paul is denying no fewer than seven things which could act as the motives behind a Christian preacher's work.

Just look with me at these seven things that he denies. First, in verse 3, he denies that he's motivated by error. Second, by impurity. Third, by deceitfulness.

Then fourth, in verse 4, he denies that he desires to please man. Fifth, in verse 5, he denies that he wishes to flatter people. And sixth, also in verse 5, that he's motivated by greed.

[27 : 25] That's greed for money, not for fish and chips. And seventh, verse 6, he denies that he's been seeking glory from people. And in the midst of these seven denials, there is one affirmation.

And it's in the middle of verse 4. The one thing that motivates Paul, Silas, and Timothy is the desire to please God who tests our hearts.

Now, you might say, but why on earth should Paul or any preacher in the 21st century want to flatter people or deceive them or seek glory from them? Well, let me paint an imaginary scenario in a 21st century city like Glasgow.

Imagine that you're a young Christian minister aged 30-something, and you've been appointed to pastor a church with a theologically mixed congregation.

The elders of this church were looking for a new pastor with, shall we say, flexible theological convictions. But the only person they could find was you. And they take you on rather nervously because they know that you believe that the Bible is the word of God and is your final authority.

[28 : 36] Well, your moving in date arrives, and you're welcomed in, perhaps on a Wednesday or Thursday evening, with smiles, and the congregation lays on one of those welcome feasts in the church hall.

Quiche Lorraine, pork pies, chocolate mousse, plenty of fresh fruit salad, which remains largely untouched. Then the senior elder, silver-haired and smiling, stands up and makes a short speech and welcomes you and your young family to the manse, expressing the wish that you'll be deeply happy.

Now, the following Sunday, you have to start preaching to this congregation. And that's where the fat can get involved with the fan. Let's say that in your first few Sundays, you preach clearly on the reality of sin, the necessity of conversion and new birth, the authority and flawlessness of the Bible, the uniqueness of Christ as the only way to God, the reality of heaven and hell, of salvation and judgment, and the non-negotiability of Christian sexual ethics, and similar subjects that have a decided and definite profile.

Well, that's the moment when you hear the fan whirring and the fat beginning to hit it. And a delegation of senior church members comes to you a day or two later and says to you, Mr.

So-and-so, we've been listening carefully to your preaching now for several weeks, and we've come to say that really we feel that you need to change your approach. You see, our tradition here in this church is one of gentleness.

[30 : 17] And inclusivity. We don't want to put people off. We want to embrace the whole community here. We need affirming preaching here, not preaching which is full of denials, preaching which I think you call it necessary negatives.

So we'd very much appreciate it if you want to continue as the minister here with our support. If you would change gear in your preaching. After all, the world is changing.

And if the church is to be loving to this fast-changing world, we have to reflect these changes in our teaching. You know, for example, that Professor Broadwith is a regular worshipper here.

And he's a world authority on comparative religion. I saw him nearly choke the other day when you insisted that Christ is the only way to God the Father. And as for your harsh teaching about sexual morality, dear, dear, dear, dear, you must realize we have a number of same-sex couples here in this congregation whose financial support we need if we're going to build the new kitchen block.

A minister needs to be in tune with the feelings of his congregation. Well, there you are. You're a young minister with a young family to feed. That's an important consideration.

[31 : 32] And you listen to this delegation. How do you respond to it? If your skin is thinner than a rhinoceros' skin, which it probably is, you're going to feel very uncomfortable.

What are you going to say in the pulpit next Sunday and all the Sundays afterwards? The pressure put upon you by that delegation is going to test you to the core.

You have to choose between the world's agenda, which they represent, and the Bible's agenda. You can't have it both ways. To use Paul's phrase here in verse 4, you have to decide whether you're going to please man or God who tests our hearts.

And your own heart is being tested. You cannot please man and God. To please man in that situation is going to mean abandoning the Bible.

I think of what this meant in terms of Paul and Thessalonica. He came to the synagogue. He loved the Jews. It was anguish to him to see so many of them rejecting the gospel.

[32 : 39] But he wasn't prepared to trim his gospel in order to accommodate their blinkered understanding of the Old Testament. If he'd wanted their approval, he would have had to reverse all seven of his denials in these verses.

So if he'd spoken from error or impurity or deceitfulness, if he'd spoken to please men, to flatter men, to make money, or to seek glory from men, he would have been the darling of the synagogue. They would have loved him and fated him and given him plenty of money. And no one would have come to Christ. But Paul rejected the pressure of those who hated his gospel.

How did he manage to stand firm? Verse 4 tells us. Look at verse 4. He knew that he had been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.

It was a sacred trust. And he was a trustee. And he wanted to please the one who had given him this trusted responsibility. And he could only do it by means of a tenacious determination to please God rather than men.

[33 : 51] Let me say this to younger people here who are potential Bible preachers and teachers of the future. It's hard and demanding to teach what the Bible teaches when you know that it cuts across certain views that are cherished by the secular world.

But think of it like this. When you preach a sermon, who is listening to you and who is watching you? Well, the congregation are listening to you and they're watching you.

But God also is listening. And God also is watching. Whom does the preacher want to please? If he's following Paul's example, he will want to please God, the one who is listening and watching from heaven.

It's God's assessment of the work, which is the only one that matters. We can be sure that when Paul was preaching the gospel in that synagogue in Thessalonica, at the end of each service, various people would have come forward and begun to argue with him, perhaps fiercely.

It would have been very uncomfortable for Paul. But he stuck with his message that Jesus is the Christ because he knew that that was the truth that God had entrusted to him.

[35 : 07] If he was beaten or stoned or imprisoned, that was part of the deal. He accepted it. He learned how to be happy and thankful and content even when he was in prison.

And he calls us to imitate him. If any of us is to be a true preacher or teacher of the Bible, we have to be prepared for unpopularity. Jesus once said, woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

Paul is saying to the Thessalonians, you know, brothers, that when we were with you, we were straightforward, honest preachers, not flatterers and not men pleasers.

Then thirdly, Paul is saying we were loving preachers, not out to make money. Let's look at the next section from verse 6, halfway through verse 6 down to verse 12.

Now in this section, Paul is contrasting the kind of religious leader whose main interest is in money with the ministry style of himself and Silas and Timothy who really cared for the Christians at Thessalonica.

[36 : 19] Look at verse 6. I think the Greek in verse 6 would be better translated if the full stop came in the middle of the verse rather than at the end. And then the verse would read, Though we could have made demands, financial demands, on you as apostles of Christ, we were gentle among you like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our very own selves because you had become very dear to us. So what does he mean by that? Does he mean that we unbuttoned all our emotions and showed you the total contents of our hearts in glorious technicolor? I don't think so. He's talking here about money and how he put food on his own table. Look at the first word of verse 9, that little word for, because that shows that verse 9 is unpacking and explaining verse 8. So when he says in verse 8 that we shared with you not only the gospel but also our own selves, he tells them in verse 9 that what he really means is that he hated the idea of asking them to pay for the ministry.

[37 : 31] Verse 9, You remember, brothers, our labor and toil. We work night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaim to you the gospel of God. In other words, Paul made tents and leather goods.

That was his trade. And Silas and Timothy perhaps worked at their trade. So they labored night and day. Day job and evening job, we might say.

So while they spent those few weeks at Thessalonica, they were teaching the believers, but they were also working hard at their trade so as to pay for their board and lodging. They hated the idea of being a financial burden to the new Christians.

Why? Because they loved them. They felt like a mother who cares for her young children in verse 7 and like a father who teaches and encourages his children in verse 11.

Do fathers and mothers expect their young children to foot the bill at Tesco's and pay the council tax? Certainly not. If Paul and Silas and Timothy had really been out to fill their wallets with the Thessalonians' money, the Thessalonians would have rumbled them.

[38 : 41] Greed for money is something that always becomes apparent in the end. Now, Paul loved these young Christians. They were his delight. Look on to verse 20 in this chapter.

You are our glory and our joy when the Lord Jesus returns. Paul cared deeply about his Thessalonian friends and their growth to Christian maturity.

And that is what mothers and fathers are for, to bring their children to maturity. Toward these Christians, Paul showed the gentleness of a nursing mother and the loving discipline and encouragement and teaching of a caring father.

So throughout this section of the letter, Paul is saying to his friends at Thessalonica, you know, you remember, you can bear me witness that we were bold and straightforward and loving when we were with you.

Bear this example of ours in mind when people slander us and try to drive you away from your faith in Christ. The integrity of our lifestyle authenticates the truth of the gospel that we preach to you.

[39 : 48] And Paul, perhaps unwittingly on his part, has passed on to us a blueprint for Christian ministry and leadership.

If a church today receives this kind of loving care, this kind of boldness in preaching, this kind of leadership lifestyle that seeks to please God rather than man, any church that has that kind of leadership is blessed.

That's the kind of ministry in the words of verse 4 that is approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. And if our church and other churches that we care about are blessed with this kind of leadership, and if we can choose and shape our future leaders who will hold to the same standards, we can trust that our gospel work will be very fruitful.

But if we abandon those standards, we abandon the gospel. Let's pray.

God, our Father, we thank you again for the example of Paul the Apostle and the way that he was able to draw upon you for boldness in preaching the truth and denying the deceptions of the devil.

[41 : 17] We do pray for our church and for other churches that we know and love, that you will bless the leadership and enable it to follow in the footsteps of Paul's pattern.

Bless us and give us, all of us, dear Father, leaders and led, the same kind of spirit of bravery and boldness, so that even when we feel fear, we're prepared to stand with those who stand with you rather than with the world.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.