

First Thessalonians 2:1-20

“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.”

I Thessalonians 2:13

Introduction:

1. *What would Paul write to a church recently converted and without problems? Let us study this book.*
2. *How should you read God’s Word? Let us see what legitimate wisdom and application we can find.*
3. *Though there may be little directly applicable material in this chapter, trust God’s spiritual wisdom.*

Intro: Paul continues praising their faithfulness and reminds them of his ministerial integrity.

1. Remember the persecution by the Jews and Paul’s desire to quickly confirm their faith.
 - a. The rabid, Christ-hating Jews set the whole city in a riot against them (Ac 17:5).
 - b. Chased to Berea and then to Athens, Paul must protect his work (I Thess 3:1-5).
2. Ministers would do well to consider this chapter wisely as describing the perfect pastor.
 - a. In it we shall see marks of false prophets and traits of God’s faithful ministers.
 - (1) Ministers are known by divine boldness in the face of persecution.
 - (2) Ministers are known by the amount of deceit in their public teaching.
 - (3) Ministers are known by the carnal and sensual liberty of their teaching.
 - (4) Ministers are known by manipulative techniques and guile in teaching.
 - (5) Ministers are known by their goals or temptations to please men or God.
 - (6) Ministers are known by the amount of flattery they use in their teaching.
 - (7) Ministers are known by any tendency, hidden or open, of covetousness.
 - (8) Ministers are known by their desire or acceptance of glory from men.
 - (9) Ministers are known by character and affection of service like nurses.
 - (10) Ministers are known by a level of affection that includes their souls.
 - (11) Ministers are known by their willingness to avoid financial questions.
 - (12) Ministers are known by the character they maintain in private conduct.
 - (13) Ministers are known by fatherly sincerity and care in perfecting saints.
 - (14) Ministers are known by the objective of perfecting saints for His glory.
 - b. While many would accuse Paul of pride for such a self-review, they are wrong.
3. Paul joins our Lord Jesus and others in foretelling the coming destruction of the Jews.
 - a. The character of the Jews was exceptionally wicked, unreasonable, and contrary.
 - b. The divine judgment coming would be soon in timing and extreme in degree.
4. And he further praises these saints highly for their believing and obeying the gospel.

2:1 Paul agrees with and appeals to the wide reputation of gospel success in Thessalonica.

- A. The last verses of chapter one describe the great and well-known conversion (1:5-10).
- B. The apostle and other saints knew of God’s grace in their lives, but he appeals to their own memory of their conversion as a further witness in confirming their gospel faith.
- C. The assurance that brought conversion was by miracles and ministerial integrity (1:5).

2:2 Paul and companions were not moved by persecution in Philippi or opposition in this city.

- A. The events at Philippi were well known by these saints in Thessalonica (Acts 16:9-40).
 1. They suffered much abuse of a demon-possessed girl and the city magistrates.
 2. They were shamefully entreated by having their clothes stripped off in public.
 3. They were put in the inner prison with their feet in stocks and no medical care.

- B. In spite of just having suffered for preaching the gospel, they were bold in Thessalonica.
- C. And as at Philippi, there was opposition here as well, which they ignored (Acts 17:5-9).
- D. Such boldness in the face of painful opposition is further evidence of God's calling.
 - 1. Most men would quickly faint and quit in the face of such violent hostilities.
 - 2. But these three ministers boldly continued in their course from God and for God.

2:3 Paul further describes their ministerial conduct in terms of sincere integrity and holiness.

- A. He defines preaching – opening and alleging about Jesus – as exhortation (Acts 17:1-3), which is earnest admonition and urging by stimulating words to proper conduct.
- B. His objective – confirming them in the faith – will be served by reminding these saints of the comprehensive and flawless character of the men who preached to them.
- C. He rejects three traits of false prophets, which were already common (II Cor 2:17; 4:2).
 - 1. **Deceit** is teaching other than the truth, which occurs when a man teaches a lie or uses texts contrary to their true sense. It is hard to imagine such men, but Pharisees and priests killed Jesus and such lying is getting worse (II Tim 3:13).
 - 2. **Uncleanness** is to teach a carnal message appealing to the baser instincts, which was true of some Greek philosophers and pagan teachers. But his gospel led to a holy life, rather than the licentious and lascivious life that was popular then.
 - 3. **Guile** is to teach in a slick and manipulative way to catch hearers unwittingly, which is often done by charisma, dramatics, or other false presentation methods. But the apostle preached Jesus Christ in simplicity without tricks (I Cor 2:1-5).
- D. Pastors, fathers, or other leaders reviewing their integrity for wise ends are not proud.
 - 1. It is a shame we equate bowed, hanging, weak, effeminate men with humility.
 - 2. It is a shame we equate bold, confident, aggressive, insistent men with pride.
 - 3. The head hanging, apologetic weakling often hides pride under false humility.
 - 4. These deluded perverts would hate Moses (Num 16:15), Joshua (Josh 24:15,19), David (I Sam 17:26-30; II Sam 6:21), Elijah (I Kings 18:21-27), Elihu (Job 32:6-14; 36:1-4), John (Matt 3:7), Jesus (Mark 11:33), and Paul (I Cor 15:10).

2:4 God's true ministers preach His word faithfully, in holy fear, without regard for man.

- A. In direct obedience to their ministerial calling, Paul and his companions were faithful.
- B. This verse refers back to the three ministerial sins and forward to the remaining traits.
- C. Since God chose and appointed them to the gospel, there was no man or group of men to whom they owed allegiance or obedience. They were God's servants only!
- D. God judges ministers, which effectively eliminates any pleasing of men (I Cor 4:1-4).
 - 1. Observe that the judgment Paul feared was at the heart level of ministers.
 - 2. The fear of man brings a snare, so true ministers must disregard men (Pr 29:25).
 - 3. Jethro, long before, taught Moses to identify and ordain faithful men (Ex 18:21).
 - 4. God charged both Jeremiah and Ezekiel not to fear man (Jer 1:8,17; Eze 3:4-11).
 - 5. Paul much later charged Timothy to preach the word without fear (II Tim 4:1-4).

2:5 He further describes their ministerial conduct as rejecting any flattery or monetary goals.

- A. Further defining true ministers, Paul rejects all flattery (Job 32:21-22; II Peter 2:18).
 - 1. It is a mark of false teachers to flatter those who can benefit them (Jude 1:16).
 - 2. Respect of persons is a severe temptation for men in office (Proverbs 28:21).
- B. And swearing by God's witness of his heart, he further denies coveting their money.
 - 1. "Clope" here is a figure for hiding, as religious hucksters hide their intentions.
 - 2. **Cloak**. That which covers over and conceals; a pretext, pretence, outward show.
 - 3. The word is used in a similar hiding sense in John 15:22 and I Peter 2:16.

4. False prophets are often covetous (Micah 3:5; II Peter 2:3,14-15; Jude 1:11).
 5. False prophets use religion for monetary gain (Titus 1:11; Matthew 23:14).
 6. Paul had a reputation that he could appeal to before the churches (Acts 20:33).
 7. Consider Samuel's plea of integrity when Israel demanded a king (I Sam 12:3).
 8. God's ministers can neither be greedy of nor given to – attracted or addicted – filthy lucre (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7; I Peter 5:2).
- C. What would be left to say, if most modern televangelists rejected these two sins? Poor Robert Schuller would be mute! And Benny Hinn and others couldn't sell holy oil!
- D. Jethro advised to find men hating covetousness (Exodus 18:21; 23:8; Deut 16:19).

2:6 He also describes their ministerial conduct as not using apostolic authority to seek glory.

- A. Paul was not interested in the praise of men, neither in Thessalonica or anywhere else.
- B. And as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, he certainly had the position to get glory.
- C. So ministers cannot be novices, lest they be lifted in pride to seek glory (I Timothy 3:6).
- D. What in the world would Rome's pope and cardinals do without any glory from men?
- E. Let us reject titles like "Reverend," "Dr.," or "Pastor" (Matthew 23:5-12; Job 32:21-22).

2:7 Paul describes their ministerial conduct as nurse-like giving rather than pope-like taking.

- A. The disjunctive conjunction "but" indicates their conduct as opposite natural tendency.
- B. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven are those who can get the lowest in service.
- C. A nurse is a sacrificial job, where constant giving and service is done without a return.
- D. None of this means Paul was effeminate or weak, as the rest of his epistles clearly show.

2:8 Paul further expands his nurse analogy to describe their fervent desire at the soul level.

- A. As a nurse cherishes her children, so Paul affectionately desired their total salvation.
- B. So strong was this affection and desire, they were sacrificial at the soul level of love.

2:9 He describes total sacrifice in ministering the gospel without any effort for personal gain.

- A. A mother or a nurse of children knows the sacrificial nature of commitment and service.
- B. Leaving personal and private support, they worked day and night to pay their own way.
- C. They worked during the day and preached at night to avoid any cost to this church, what an example for ministers to be known in their churches for their long labours.
- D. Their living example and written reminder was important at Thessalonica, for there were lazy members and busybodies among them (II Thess 3:7-12).
- E. Such conduct keeps the gospel free from the reproach of men accusing ministers of seeking filthy lucre in the "non-profit profession."
- F. For ministers to make choices in their conduct to provide an example that will further affect the minds of their people is wise and crafty, when it is done in simple sincerity.

2:10 Paul further describes their ministering as being totally consistent with their conduct.

- A. He knows both they and God had nothing to charge against them in their conduct.
- B. For those who think all swearing is wrong, can't they see Paul swearing here?
- C. The truth is taught, confirmed, and defended by holy and blameless ministers (Numbers 16:15; II Samuel 12:14; I Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8; I Peter 5:2-3).
- D. The truth is taught, confirmed, and defended by holy and blameless saints (Phil 2:15; I Tim 5:14; 6:1; Tit 2:5,10; I Peter 2:12,15; 3:16).

2:11 A minister's work is very similar to a father's, in exhortation, comfort, and charging.

- A. The proof of truth in their ministry was the affection, desire, and sincerity of a father.

- B. Ministerial work of the fundamental variety comparable to fathering has three elements.
 - 1. Exhortation is pressing encouragement with follow up toward their duties.
 - 2. Comfort is reminding of blessings and promises to strengthen and hearten.
 - 3. Charging is commanding duties and warning of punishment for disobedience.
- C. The simplest rule for identifying a minister is the conduct and character of his family.
 - 1. If a man cannot lead, rule, train, and teach his family, he cannot be a bishop.
 - 2. Being a good father requires very many of the same traits as being a bishop.
 - 3. A father must rule, guide, lead, teach, listen, adjust, compromise, comfort, provoke, warn, punish, reward, observe, analyze, perceive, and other things.
 - 4. Ordaining a man without wife and children would be a risky proposition indeed.
 - 5. Even a man without sons has not had the challenges he will face in the ministry.
- D. Being a father includes exhortation, comfort, and charging. How do you measure up?
- E. Fathers are to bring their children up in the Lord's nurture and admonition (Eph 6:4).
 - 1. **Nurture.** Breeding, upbringing, training, education. That which nourishes; nourishment, food.
 - 2. **Admonition.** The action of admonishing; authoritative counsel; warning, implied reproof. **Admonish.** To put (a person) in mind of duties; to counsel against wrong practices; to give authoritative or warning advice; to exhort, to warn.

2:12 The ministerial object of a true bishop is the forming of godliness in the children of God.

- A. The object of all their private and public conduct was to perfect them in the sight of God, which confirmed powerfully the message as one of truth and Divine origin.
 - 1. Arminianism is a cancer on Christianity and the ministry, for it emphasizes a single decision in a life rather than the progress of sanctification taught by God.
 - 2. Ministers have one goal – to perfect saints at the coming of Christ (Col 1:28-29).
 - 3. All choices in lifestyle, sermons, activities, and relationships should serve it.
- B. The goal is to find God's elect and mold their lives to please the God Who elected them.
 - 1. Walk refers to the actual conduct of a person's life – their day to day living.
 - 2. Worthy describes comparable and similar to God, rather than being worthy.
 - 3. He has appointed us to His glorious kingdom, and we should live accordingly.
 - 4. If God has adopted us as children, let us give our Father pleasure (Eph 5:1).

2:13 Paul commends them for the attitude they showed toward the preaching of God's word.

- A. The proper reception of preaching is a gift from God, as most men reject and despise it.
- B. It is so vital to forget the man, other than confirming witness of character as just delineated, in order to focus on the precious substance of God's very words.
- C. The Word of God will bear fruit in the lives of those who will believe and obey it.
 - 1. It is not a power in and of itself, as so many wish us to believe (Hebrews 4:12).
 - 2. The Word of God bears fruit in those who know, believe, and obey it (Col 1:6).
 - 3. We are to desire the sincere milk of the word in order to grow by it (I Peter 2:2).
 - 4. Faith comes – is brought to activity – by hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:17).
- D. Receiving the word with all readiness of mind is a noble trait of great believers.
- E. Every hearer must divorce the speaker from the words spoken and hear only the Lord.
 - 1. Cornelius had the perfect spirit and goal – to hear God's commands (Ac 10:33).
 - 2. Thoughts of who is being addressed are foolishly wicked (Matt 7:3-5; Jn 21:22).
 - 3. Every thought of how the speaker has failed or does fail is highly dangerous.
 - a. Those who despised Moses for his failure certainly suffered far worse.
 - b. Those who despise David for his failures certainly miss God's wisdom.

- c. Those who despised Peter for his failure found him leading at Pentecost.
- 4. The warning of the Lord Jesus is to take heed how each man hears (Luke 8:18).

2:14 He states the effectual work of preaching was confirmed by obedience under affliction.

- A. The first churches of Christianity were in Jerusalem and Judea, which the Thessalonians emulated in their devotion to Jesus Christ in spite of pain, loss, and persecution.
- B. There was a huge uproar in Thessalonica, caused by Jews hating the gospel of Christ.
- C. It is nothing to rejoice during a service or even for a month or so, as the stony ground often makes this immediate response. The true test is under the heat of suffering.

2:15 Paul honestly and accurately describes the character of the Jews by inspiration of God.

- A. They killed the Lord Jesus Christ out of envy, though Pilate surely tried to save Him.
- B. They betrayed the Lord Jesus to a foreign power and demanded the painful death of crucifixion, and they chose to have a seditious murderer released to freedom instead.
- C. They had killed their own prophets for years, which God had kindly sent to save them.
- D. They killed, tried to kill, and did persecute the apostles. Which we read about in Acts.
- E. They did not please God, regardless of Jewish fables about their chosen status before God. Titus, general of the Roman armies in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and Josephus, the captured general of the Jewish armies who served as his interpreter, both confirm the extraordinarily depraved and insanely contrary mind of the Jews.
- F. They are contrary to all men in their rabid independence, rebellion, and contrary spirit.
- G. Jesus said His generation would be more devil possessed than others (Matt 12:43-45).

2:16 Paul continues his negative description of the Jews with a warning of imminent judgment.

- A. Though they counted the gospel a despised heresy, they would not let the Gentiles hear.
- B. This list of six actions and characteristics was sufficient to fill up their sinful judgment.
- C. God's prophesied and promised wrath upon that generation of Jews was close at hand.
 - 1. It was not bare wrath that was coming, but the wrath – prophesied wrath of God.
 - 2. It was not bare wrath in general, but wrath against a very particular people.
 - 3. It was not bare wrath that was coming, but extreme wrath, unlike any before.
 - 4. It was not bare wrath in concept or a vague future, but presently ready to burst.
- D. Here Paul confirms all the warnings before, from John the Baptist (Matt 3:7-12) to Peter (Acts 2:40), of the coming desolation of Jerusalem that Jesus had given that generation.
- E. This was the approaching day Paul warned converted Hebrews to look for (Heb 10:25).
- F. It is a horrible travesty the destruction of Jerusalem has been denied much importance.

2:17 Contrary to the cursed Jews, Paul and brethren express deep affection for these saints.

- A. Though there is great opposition to the gospel and saints, Paul loved them dearly.
- B. Though they might be absent in bodily presence, they were still there in heart affection.
- C. Though they had left after only a short stay, they had been striving to return for a visit.

2:18 Paul had made efforts to visit them already more than once, but Satan had hindered him.

- A. Satan cannot stand the gospel and does all he can to resist it, but Jesus Christ and the gospel message of Him went through the gates of hell to deliver these elect saints.
- B. Consider how Satan stood up against Israel (I Chron 21:1) and Peter (Luke 22:31).
- C. Consider the resistance the devil gave to Michael regarding the body of Moses (Jude 1:9) and the angels protecting Israel from Persian and Greece (Daniel 10:13,20).
- D. Satan can do nothing but what God allows him to do, so do not be discouraged here.
- E. Paul, being the leader of the three with special appointment, personally loved them.

2:19 He expresses their importance to himself and the others by future ministerial accounting.

- A. Paul asks rhetorically, What is the moving ambition and desire of our ministerial hearts?
 - 1. Summarizing a chapter of many ministerial claims, he gives their pastoral goals.
 - 2. He encourages them by proving he has powerful motives driving his affection.
 - 3. His desire, affection, and commitment to them were from great responsibility.
 - 4. For what do we greatly hope? What gives us great joy? What is the greatest joy?
 - 5. The answer – perfect Thessalonian saints at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. Ministers must give a ministerial account to their Captain, Christ Jesus (Heb 13:17).
 - 1. So they watch for men's souls with sober responsibility and holy seriousness.
 - 2. A grieving account of fruitlessness and trouble brings judgment to members.
- F. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is the great and blessed hope of true believers.
 - 1. Notice the repetition of this hope to this church (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23).
 - 2. An apostle not only saw our risen Lord, but knew of His sure return (Acts 1:11).
 - 3. The grace of God teaches us godliness and self-denial in light of it (Tit 2:11-14).
 - 4. Ministers are warned about their calling in light of it (II Tim 4:1; I Tim 6:14).
 - 5. We shouldn't be comfortable and happy here with such a hope (Rom 8:23-25).
 - 6. Why does He take so long in coming? To fool skeptics, build our faith, and give each of us an opportunity to repent fully and be ready (II Peter 3:3-9; I Pet 1:7).
 - 7. The apostolic life for New Testament saints is viewing His return (Phil 3:17-21).
 - 8. Do you love the thought of His coming? He will save you (II Tim 4:8; He 9:28).
 - 9. A great motivating factor in our lives should be His coming (I John 2:28 – 3:3).

2:20 The obedience and faithfulness of this church caused Paul's company to glory and rejoice.

- A. The Thessalonians were not lost in the multiplied labors, travels, and converts of Paul and his companions, for they rejoiced and gloried in their profession and obedience.
- B. As nurses and fathers, they had great gentleness and comfort in praising these saints.