

Thessalonians, Part 3: Sharing Our Souls

1 Thessalonians 2:1 ESV (Pg. 573) For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. **2** 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. **3** For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, **4** 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. **5** For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. **6** Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. **7** But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. **8** 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 had become very dear to us. **9** For 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 proclaimed to you the gospel of God. **10** You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. **11** For you know how, like a father with his children, **12** we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

- I. We've discussed how Paul established the church in Thessalonica in a few short weeks. But Paul was run out of town when the Jews, who were jealous of the powerful impact the gospel was having there, started a riot. So he moved on to Athens, and then to Corinth, leaving Timothy and Silas behind. While in Corinth, he longed to hear from his associates, to know how the new church was faring under the persecution that had begun. 1 Thessalonians was written after Timothy and Silas returned with news of the church, as well as questions from the believers.
 - A. Fortunately, the report was that the church was thriving. The people were standing strong in their faith, and were demonstrating that the Holy Spirit was working in them, transforming their lives. They were also becoming known as passionate witnesses for Jesus and his gospel in their region of Macedonia.
 - B. But chapter 2 gives us a strong indication that something else was happening. The integrity of Paul's ministry and motives seem to have been slandered by some group or another. It could have been the jealous Jews, or perhaps some of the cynical pagan philosophers and cults in the city, or perhaps even both.
 1. We arrive at this conclusion because chapter 2 reads like a legal defense. Paul's visit would have still been fresh in the memory of the Thessalonians, and so he appeals to their experience with his ministry there to defend himself; saying "you yourselves know", "as you know", "you remember" and "you are witnesses" over and over again, along with "God is witness".
 2. He is appealing to their own reason and experience to establish the integrity of his work among them, so that no matter what his opponents say, the church's own memories will confirm his love and effective labor there.
 - C. **1 Thessalonians 1:5b ESV** You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. Paul has said in chapter 1 that their ministry served as a model for the Thessalonians' imitation. He says "you became imitators of us".

1. While we must always strive to point people to Jesus, and away from ourselves, that doesn't negate the fact that we who follow Christ should live exemplary lives, beyond reproach. This is so that people can see evidence of the gospel's power and the Spirit's work, and be drawn to it.
 - a) I fear that many believers live the kinds of lives that can only cause onlookers to charge the message of the gospel with being "false advertising". I cringe every time I see some heretic, fool or criminal in the news being described as a "Christian" or worse yet, a "Pastor".
 - b) I want to shout at the TV, "Please don't lump them in with us!" But, truthfully, does your speech, or your attitude make the gospel appealing in its consistency, or distasteful in its inconsistency? A Christian T-Shirt or bumper sticker can't fix what's broken with your daily, living testimony!
2. But Paul boldly said "Follow me as I follow Christ."¹ He told Timothy to be an example regardless of his youth.² He told the Corinthians that they were living letters "to be known and read by all"; both endorsing the gospel and those who were preaching it³. What kind of example are we to others?
 - D. But his defense wasn't just to give them an ideal to shoot for, he was defending his ministry for the security of these new believers because he didn't want them to be deceived. He lists several things that he might have been accused of by the Jews and pagans of Thessalonica, who probably weren't too excited to be stripped of their influence because the new converts received the gospel.
 1. **1 Thessalonians 2:3 ESV** For our appeal does not spring from *error or impurity* or any *attempt to deceive*...**5** For we never came with *words of flattery*, as you know, nor with a *pretext for greed*—God is witness. **6** Nor did we *seek glory from people, whether from you or from others*...
 - a) Paul states that their preaching wasn't tainted by error, impurity or deception. Everything they said was backed by both the authority of scripture, and the power of the Holy Spirit. They were not covetous of power or money. They also didn't employ trickery to gain a few converts.
 - b) In the previous verse, he points to the persecution and shameful treatment they had experienced at Philippi (where they were beaten and jailed) as the impetus for their boldness. Anyone with a false or weak message probably wouldn't have persevered under such treatment.
 2. He goes on to say in verse 5 and 6 that he, Silas and Timothy, came as servants, never intending to exploit the Thessalonians in any way.
 - a) They flattered no one; meaning they spoke of both God's wrath and mercy; not just telling the people only what they wanted to hear. I think on judgement day, many of us will have to account for our flatteries, as we have sometimes tried to soften the whole counsel of God's Word, in an effort not to offend sinners, while they continue to offend God.
 - b) They were not motivated by greed. They weren't digging in the pockets of the people they preached to, like the cultists of the 1st Century; or the TV huckster preachers of today, who use God's people to fund the desires of their greedy hearts; buying multi-million dollar homes and airplanes.

- c) **Isaiah 42:8 ESV** I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Paul says they did not seek glory for themselves from anyone; not the people of the church, or even their colleagues. They weren't trying to get a broadcast deal, or make the best seller list. They were entirely spent for the glory of their King.
- E. **1 Thessalonians 2:4 ESV** 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. God's glory was their total motivation! Giving God glory was the fountain of all of their power and endurance for ministry.
1. When they say that they have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, they mean that their ministry had the blessing of God, because they were following Christ, and not seeking glory, money, or popularity.
 - a) Their lives were now governed by God's Spirit, and submitted to his will. They were not driven by their own interests, passions or agendas.
 - b) Because of this, the promise of Christ was fulfilled, that they would receive power after the Holy Spirit came upon them, to be his witnesses⁴.
 2. To have the approval of God is the most freeing thought to the believer's soul. W.A. Criswell once told a story of train master who was responsible for the smooth operation of a busy metropolitan depot. Someone in the station commended him one day for the way he displayed grace and tact as he juggled all his tasks: answering passenger questions, giving directions, and maintaining order in the train station, even when dealing with so many hurried, disgruntled and angry people. When asked, "How do you do it?", the train master said, "It's really no big deal. I don't have to please all these people. I only have to please one man." And with that, he pointed to a small window in an upstairs office where his boss was looking down upon him.⁵
 - a) What if we lived our lives only to please our master who is looking down on us? How less harried and stressful would our lives be, if we were only after the approval of God, and everything else flowed out of that pursuit?
 - b) **Proverbs 29:25 ESV** The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe. So Paul says that their preaching was motivated by a desire to please God and not man. May it be so with you and I as well.
 3. Notice that in verse 4, Paul says that they are approved by God (past-tense), and yet later says that God "tests our hearts" (present-tense).
 - a) This is a good thing to remember. If we are truly in Christ, we are fully justified and nothing can change that, We are approved by God!
 - b) But we must know that God is daily testing the integrity of our hearts and our confession; and he is allowing whatever is necessary to come into our lives, so that we will be molded into the image of Jesus Christ.
- II. So Paul has stated what they **weren't** during their time in Thessalonica. Now he will remind them of what they **were**. He says they were "gentle" (v. 7). They were "affectionately desirous of them" (v. 8). They worked hard not to be a burden to the believers (v. 9). Their conduct was holy, righteous and blameless (v. 10). Paul sums up their heart towards the new church: **1 Thessalonians 2:8b ESV** we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you

had become very dear to us. It is sharing of the life (or “self”) that defines an authentic ministry. Without this element of a shared life, we are just lecturers.

- A. When the Paul says that they shared their “selves”, the Greek word is “psyche”; meaning the soul⁶. The soul is the seat of the human mind, will, and emotions. In using psyche, Paul telling the Thessalonians that they occupied his mind; that they were ever in his thoughts. **1 Thessalonians 1:2 ESV We give thanks to God *always* for all of you, *constantly mentioning you* in our prayers, *3 remembering* before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**
1. When we truly have a burden to see people know Christ or grow in him, it’s not something you can “clock out” from. They will creep into your subconscious, and keep you up at night. They will be the centerpiece of all your intercessory prayers. Their burdens will become your burdens.
 2. Ginger and I will often get a date night, and we’ll decide that we’re not going to talk about the people of NRLC at all! But usually, after about 5 minutes we begin to share about who we’re praying for, and are concerned about. It’s reflexive for us. Our love for you makes it so. Paul felt the same way about the people that he loved and ministered to.
- B. But psyche also implies the will. Paul made decisions based on what was best for the Thessalonians, like leaving Timothy and Silas behind, when they would have been of tremendous value to him while he was traveling. The use of Paul’s will for the Thessalonians is captured in the beautiful description of himself as like “a nursing mother” and yet “like a Father with his children”. In his ministry to them, Paul encapsulated, in one man, loving parental devotion.
1. There is nothing more beautiful than a baby nestled at its mother’s breast. A bond forms in those moments that can take that same tender, gentle woman and turn her into a grizzly if you mess with her kids! Paul was gentle and not harsh with the Thessalonians, and yet ready to defend them against any who would deceive them, or derail their progress in following Christ.
 2. But he was also like a father: exhorting, encouraging, and charging or challenging them. Kids need dads to cheer them on. They need them to expect more, and call out the greatness in them when they don’t see it themselves. This is who Paul was!
- C. Paul’s charge to the Thessalonians is very fatherly. **1 Thessalonians 2:12b ESV we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.**
1. Paul’s direction to them was that even if he were never able to be with their little church again, that they should endure. They should keep on going!
 2. They were to order their lives in way in a way that was pleasing to God, because they had been called out of the world they had always known, and been called into his eternal kingdom; with all new priorities, a whole new economy for living, and a promise of glory to be revealed at the end.
 3. His two letters are dripping with fatherly encouragement to keep on enduring through hardship. As a spiritual parent, Paul exercised his will for the Thessalonians benefit, never demanding they serve for his benefit.

- D. But the soul (psyche) is also the fountain of our emotions. Think about Paul's words in this letter: we were "affectionately desirous of you", "you had become very dear to us" (2:8), "we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face" (2:17), "you are our glory and joy" (2:20), "we long to see you" (3:6), Paul describes "all the joy that we feel for your sake" (3:9).
1. True Christianity is not a life of **feelings**, but it is certainly a life that **feels**. Think of the times the gospels describe Jesus as "moved with compassion"⁷. When was the last time you or I were moved to actual action by our compassion for either the lost, or our brothers and sisters in Christ?
 2. Our love for God and others in action, if it is genuine, will constantly exercise and display the whole range of our emotions.
 - a) In relating to others, the Bible says: **Romans 12:15 ESV Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.**
 - b) And even more so to the Lord! **Psalm 100:1 ESV Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! 2 Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! 3 Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! 5 For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.**
- III. Sharing our souls is the essence of the act of taking communion together. The word communion literally means "common union". Members of Christ's church, come to the table, not only feasting on Christ, but we are also sharing him with each other.
- A. Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians was based in the fact that they were not sharing the table, but pushing each other aside and selfishly consuming its elements. By doing so, they were not only failing to share the bread and wine, but they were far from sharing their souls (their lives) with each other as well.
 - B. **1 Corinthians 11:17 ESV But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18a For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.**
 1. Paul could not commend them because they were selfish; not even concerned about the others. They were divided, not co-mingling their lives together, but pursuing only their own agendas, interests and benefits.
 2. Paul said that their meetings were more harmful than helpful in this regard, and he could not commend them, no matter what else they got right! In a couple of chapters he will point out the vast number of spiritual gifts operating among them, but this did not compensate for their lack of love.
 - C. **1 Corinthians 11:18b ESV And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.**

1. In looking at the Corinthians around the table, all Paul could see was injustice and inequity. There was not a heart to serve each other, or elevate those who were down-trodden; just "each one goes ahead with his own". He said to take communion in this way was to "despise the church of God".
 2. This is at least part of what Paul meant when he said later in this chapter **1 Corinthians 11:29 ESV** For anyone who eats and drinks without *discerning the body* eats and drinks judgment on himself.
 - a) Paul is saying that there are 2 representations of the Body of Christ at this table: the bread, which represents the physical body of Christ, sacrificed for our sins; and the gathering of the people of God, which we are told time and time again, is the living breathing Body of Christ.
 - b) When people do not recognize the reality of what is going on here (in either or both ways!) they dishonor Christ. They are warned that the Lord will discipline those who dishonor Christ's body.
- D. So as we come to partake of the Lord's supper this morning, come with a greater awareness of your brothers and sisters who are joining you. Before you partake, I'd like to ask you to take a moment and share a word of greeting or encouragement, or maybe even a quick prayer for their needs. I charge you to come this morning with the intention to share your soul with each other
- E. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:1

² 1 Timothy 4:12

³ 2 Corinthians 3:1-3

⁴ Acts 1:8

⁵ W.A. Criswell; from “The Pattern of the Servant of God”; referenced by *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians*; by Mark Howell; Pg. 31; © 2015 B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, TN

⁶ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G5590&t=KJV>

⁷ Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 18:27, 20:34; Mark 1:41, 6:34