

The Marks Of A Model Minister (Part 1)

1 Thessalonians 2:1-6

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In Thessalonians 1, we were introduced to the model church. They were the elect, they were evangelistic and they were expectant. In the fact that they were the elect, they had a “work of faith.” In the fact that they were evangelistic, they had a “labor of love.” And their expectancy was in their “patience of hope.” So they had faith, hope and love. They were a model church. And Paul commends them in chapter 1.

Now in chapters 2-3, we move to the model minister. It's kind of fitting that we learn what God's design is for the church, in chapter 1, and then we learn what God's design is for the minister, in chapters 2-3. So Paul moves from commendation, in chapter 1, to vindication, in chapters 2-3.

Why would Paul have to vindicate himself and his ministry? It's because Paul was under attack from unbelieving Jews. It seems that wherever Paul the Apostle went and preached the Gospel, there were always enemies of the Cross of Christ. There were especially unbelieving Jews, the religious community, that opposed Paul, attacked Paul and tried to undermine the man so they could undermine his ministry or message. They were attacking Paul so they could attack the validity of the Gospel that he preached. Satan always tries to discredit God's messenger so he can undermine the message.

This is why, when you read in 1 Timothy 3:2 in the qualifications for an elder or pastor, they are to be above reproach. That doesn't mean they are sinless or perfect; it means that they live in such a way that if anyone accuses them, it will not stick. They may accuse the minister, but he is living above reproach; there is no way the accusation can hold water because of the way he lives his life.

Now in chapters 2-3, we get a picture of the model minister. First I want to remind you as we go through this passage that even though it's talking about the pastoral ministry or those who are called to preach, every one of us are to be ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe that every member of the church should be a minister; we should want to serve the Lord for His glory. We should all want to be used by God. So the principles we'll learn in Paul's life in chapters 2 and 3 are applicable to all of us.

In Verses 1-12 of chapter 2 we will see three pictures of the pastor. First, we'll see that he is a faithful steward, verses 1-6, which we'll cover today. Second, he's a gentle mother, verses 7-8. It's kind of amazing that Paul would liken his ministry to a mother who nursed her children. And third, Paul is a concerned father, verses 9-12.

Verses 1-6 show Paul as a faithful steward. Paul says, “For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.” It means it was not “empty” or “void.” It was with results; it's wasn't a failure. “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” or

“agony” or “struggle.” “For our exhortation...”—Paul’s referring to his preaching—“...did not come from error...”—or the King James says “guile”—“...or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. 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. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.”

The concept of stewardship is found in verse 4: “We have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.” The word “steward” is not found in this verse, but the concept is here. It is the idea of God entrusting to us the Gospel, “even so we speak.” That is in the present tense. We are speaking or we are preaching. So God tested our hearts, and He proved us worthy. He gave to us the Gospel as a deposit, for our safekeeping, and for us to be stewards over it.

The concept of stewardship was illustrated in the life of Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph had a coat of many colors, his brothers hated him, so they sold him as a slave into Egypt. He was bought by Potiphar, and Joseph became a steward in charge of all Potiphar owned. Potiphar owned it all but Joseph stewarded it all. A steward didn’t own anything but controlled everything. So a wealthy landowner would entrust his steward with the care of his children, the care of his finances, with the care of his household and with the care of all his goods. The owner may not even know all of what he owned, he just trusted the steward to manage it.

We have what we call “trustees.” When someone dies, the person who had been picked now makes sure the goods and finances of the decedent get distributed according to the trust.

Joseph was a perfect picture of a trustee or a steward or a faithful servant. That picture is used in the New Testament by Paul to apply to a minister. We are the good stewards of the mysteries of God. And the number one quality of a steward is faithfulness. When we get to heaven, if we’ve been faithful, God is going to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant....Enter into the joy of the Lord.” He’s not going to say, “good and talented,” “good and smart” but “good and faithful.”

You may think you don’t have good ability. It doesn’t matter. If you are faithful to what God entrusts to you, you’ll hear those words when you get to heaven.

So Paul used this picture to express his privilege in having the Gospel entrusted to him, and it was his responsibility to faithfully preach the Gospel.

What are the marks of a faithful servant? I am going to give you six qualities of a faithful servant. Each of these six verses has a separate quality of a faithful servant. Quality number one, in verse 1, is their ministry will not be in vain. That’s the negative as Paul presents it. Or you might say that the positive is their ministry will be effective, it will be fruitful and it will be profitable. Paul said, “For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.”

Basically Paul is saying that when they came to Thessalonica and preached the Word, when they ministered among them and the church was started, the Thessalonians know that it wasn't futile or vain or empty. They had an effect; they were effectual and had success in their ministry among them.

As we go through this section, we try to figure out what the critics were accusing Paul of and thus why he said what he said. But we can't be dogmatic about it. This section is autobiographical and historical. It makes it a little difficult to know exactly, but it's not didactic—he's not teaching like he is when we get to chapters 4 and 5.

Paul is actually answering his critics in this section. The only reason he does that is because of the Gospel. He's not worried about himself. He's not worried about what people think of him. He doesn't care what people say about him. But he's doesn't want the Gospel to be undermined, because the Gospel comes through man. If you undermine the man, you undermine the message. The message is only as valid as the man who preaches it.

So Paul is saying that he didn't come to them in vain. His ministry among them was fruitful. He no doubt tied himself in with Silvanus and Timothy, who ministered in Thessalonica with him, chapter 1, verse 1.

I want you to note a key phrase Paul uses repeatedly, not only in chapters 2 and 3, but through the whole book of 1 Thessalonians. It's the phrase "You know," "Ye know" or "You remember." In verse 1, it says, "You yourselves know." In the Greek, the word "yourself" is the first word in that sentence, so it's emphatic—and it's intended to be emphatic. It's as if it says, "You, personally, know firsthand." Paul is reminding them of what they know. One of the best ways to defend yourself when you're being attacked is to simply state the facts and remind people of the truth.

This phrase also appears in verse 2: Paul said, "As you know." It appears again in verse 5: "As you know." Again, in verse 9: "For you remember." In verse 10, we have, "You are witnesses." And in verse 11, it says, "As you know." So Paul is reminding them that they know it is a fact that when he and the others came among them, they knew their ministry was effective.

1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 says, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power..."—the Greek word is "dunamis"—"...and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit." So the Thessalonians knew what they were, what they did, how they lived and what they preached. They knew the message they preached wasn't in vain. And their lives were changed, verse 6, by the power of the Gospel. Then in chapter 2, verse 1, Paul says, "For you yourselves know, brethren that our coming to you was not in vain." There were results.

So the point I want to make is if you are a faithful steward of the ministry God has entrusted to you, your ministry will be fruitful. It won't be in vain. It won't be hollow. It won't be empty. You

produce fruit for the glory of God as a faithful steward.

In 1 Corinthians 15:58, Paul says, "My beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." I like that passage. In verse 2 of our passage, he is going to talk about the suffering and the afflictions they endured, but they were bold in God to preach the Gospel. If you always abound in God's Word, your labor won't be in vain.

You've heard the saying, "Only one life will soon be past, and only what's done for Christ will last." If you want a life that's fruitful and effective, be a faithful steward of what God's entrusted to you.

The second characteristic or quality of a faithful servant is they are bold in the face of persecution. Persecution does not hinder them or cause them to change, water down or soften the message, verse 2. "But even after we had suffered before...." Paul's talking about his first arrival months before in Philippi and how they "had suffered before and were spitefully treated." The suffering was physical suffering. "Spitefully treated" meant insults against them or psychological suffering. He said, "...at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict" or "anguish" or "agony" or "struggle."

We know from Acts 16 when Paul went to Philippi, that he and Silas were arrested, thrown into prison, whipped, beaten, their hands and feet put into stocks and locked up at night. God sent an earthquake, the doors of the prison opened and the jailer was converted.

So in verse 2, Paul is mentioning the suffering they endured at Philippi, physically and shamefully, or insulted in an arrogant manner.

When Paul was arrested, beaten and jailed in Philippi, that was illegal, because he was a Roman citizen. When the magistrates found this out, they were going to let Paul out of jail, but Paul refused and decided this incident wouldn't quietly disappear. Paul wanted them to escort them out of town. Paul wanted everyone to see they had done nothing wrong. He also didn't want this infant church in Thessalonica to be persecuted for the Gospel.

And Paul was alluding to the fact that neither did the persecution keep him from preaching. It would have been very easy for him to water down the message. Everywhere Paul went it started a revival or a riot. After a couple of riots, beatings or imprisonments, it was a temptation for Paul to instead preach health and wealth or prosperity. Or maybe they should preach, "I'm okay. You're okay. Everybody's okay. Maybe we shouldn't tell them they had to repent. Maybe we shouldn't tell them Jesus is the only way. Maybe we should soften our message a little bit and make it more palatable. Make it more contemporary. Smile a lot. Make everybody happy and feel good. Tell them they're the head and not the tail. Tell them they're a King's kid." Give them the positive message.

I can't tell you how many times I've heard, "I don't want negative preachers. I don't want to hear about hell. I don't want to hear about repentance. I don't want to hear the word 'sin.'" It's in the

Bible! Do you want to hear the Bible, or do you want your ears tickled? Paul said, “The time will come when...because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” We are in those days right now.

So a faithful steward will preach the Word of God, even in the face of persecution. It didn't daunt Paul, stop Paul or hinder Paul. They were beat up, thrown in prison, but they kept on preaching. Notice what he said: “We were bold in our God,” verse 2. Their boldness was in God; it wasn't in their own strength, in their own power, in their own ability or in their own resources. Their boldness was a holy boldness that came from God.

If God calls you to preach, persecution comes and you are faithful to preach His Word, then you can trust God to give you the strength, the ability and the boldness—some translations renders this “audacity”—to keep preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul didn't water it down or change it because of persecution.

You want to know whether a minister is a true minister? Let's see what happens when he is persecuted. Let's see what happens when he goes to jail. Let's see what happens when he is arrested. Let's see what happens when he is told to no longer preach in the name of Jesus Christ.

One of my heroes is John Bunyan. He wrote the spiritual allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*. He was a free preacher; he wasn't part of the established church. It was illegal for him to preach, but he preached because he was called by God to preach. He was then thrown in prison. While in prison he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*. They came to John Bunyan and said, “If you say you won't preach again, we'll let you out of prison. If you promise never to preach again, we'll let you go.” He had a little, blind daughter, who was dependent on him, and a wife, so his attention was needed at home. But John Bunyan said, “If you let me out today, this afternoon, I'll be in the town square preaching the Gospel.” He was a true, faithful servant of Christ. He wouldn't be daunted or hindered by the persecution.

I often wondered how I would respond if I were thrown in prison. How would you respond if you were told that if you preached, you would be tied to a pole, lit on fire or killed? Or they would throw you to the lions? Would you be bold in your God and preach the Gospel, even if it meant certain death? Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Fear God.

So the true mark of a faithful servant is that they are bold in the face of persecution.

Here is the third characteristic of a faithful servant is in verse 3. They are committed to truth, purity and integrity. “For our exhortation...”—that is, Paul's “preaching”—“...did not come...”—here's the negative again—“...from error...”—or “guile”—“...or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.”

First of all, Paul's critics attacked his message: his preaching or “exhortation.” It was not of “deceit” or “error.” In other words, he was preaching the truth. The accusers were saying that

Paul's preaching was false, not true, not the Word of God. They were trying to malign his message.

How do you know that what a man preaches is true or false? Look in the Bible.

I hear people say all the time, "Pastor Miller, I was watching this guy on TV." Not always, but usually when it's on TV, I'm suspicious. I'm on the radio; I'm not on TV. There are good preachers on TV. Just very few. "What do you think of this preacher? He reads from the Bible. He quotes Scripture."

My thought is, So do the Jehovah's Witnesses when they knock on my door. And the Mormons carry Bibles, read Bibles and quote Scripture. So when you're listening to someone preach—as I'm preaching right now—you need to ask yourself, "Is that not only in the Bible, but is that what it means?"

Why is it that when we listen to preachers expound a verse, we don't ask ourselves, "Is that what it really means? Is that what Paul really meant?" It's called "authorial intent." A verse means what the author intended it to mean.

Don't you hate it when people ask you, "What did you mean by that?" I meant what I said, and I said what I meant. I don't have some hidden meaning in my words. Some people look at the Bible and ask, "Wow! What does that really mean?" It means what it says.

So the preacher is to be Biblical, not just read from the Bible. Anybody can take a text here and a text there out of context and make it a pretext to support their view or idea. A lot of preachers come up with a topic, and then they find verses to support it.

What I think preaching should be is that when you find a verse, you find out what it means and what it says, and that's what you preach. Or you pick another verse out of the Bible where the text is master and dictates the topic of the sermon. It's so important. But we have so much preaching that is going on today that is from the Bible, but it's not Biblical. It's not consistent with Scripture.

So you need to ask yourself, "Is that Biblical? Is that what the Bible truly teaches?" You must be Bereans and search the Scriptures to see if what is preached is really true and consistent with the Scriptures.

Secondly, Paul's critics attacked his motives, verse 3. This really hurts, because only God knows the heart. Only God knows why the preacher preaches. "Uncleanness" in verse 3 means "impurity." We don't know in this verse if it means sexual impurity or wrong motives like greed or ambition or desire to be popular. Certainly there were a lot of false teachers who practiced sexual immorality; it was common in that day. And they probably were accusing Paul of that. Or they could have accused him of false motives.

Thirdly, in verse 3, Paul's critics attacked his methods. It says, "Nor was it in deceit" or "guile."

The word “guile” means “to bait a hook.” It was used of a fishhook and the bait that would be attached. When you fish, you don’t want the fish to see the hook. You want to put bait on the hook that attracts the fish. You don’t put up a big sign on it that says, “Bite this and you’ll die, because there’s a hook in it.” Fishermen are deceivers; they create a lure that’s not real. It looks like a fly or something they want to eat, so the fish grab it and then they’re hooked.

So Paul is being accused of wearing a mask to preach things that aren’t true and luring people into false teaching and false doctrine. They said his teaching was devious and deceptive.

So the King James Bible says in verse 3, “of deceit...of uncleanness...in guile.” The Greek word “of” here speaks of the fact that the deceit and uncleanness were actually the source of his preaching he was accused of. But the word “in” here—“in guile”—indicates the sphere of or the atmosphere in which he was preaching. So they were saying that everything about Paul’s preaching was done in the atmosphere of deception and deceit.

Now the fourth characteristic or quality of a faithful pastor or minister is commissioned and approved by God. He’s not self-appointed, but he is called and commissioned by God. No man should be in pastoral ministry who isn’t convinced of the call of God on his life to preach. It’s not a self-appointed position. Verse 4 says, “But as we have been approved...”—or “allowed”—“...by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak...”—it’s in the present tense, or “speaking” or “preaching”—“...not as pleasing men...”—it was a sacred trust—“...but God who tests our hearts.” “Allowed” has the idea of “tested.” “To be entrusted” has the idea of a steward. “Tests” or “tries our hearts” is the same Greek word as “allowed.” It means “to prove” or “to test for approval.”

God alone knows our motives. Be careful when you attack someone’s motives; only God knows the heart. We can examine their doctrine and methods and preaching, but God alone knows their heart. Paul says in the King James version, “And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness.”

So it means that they were not self-appointed; they were anointed and called by God. They were entrusted with the Gospel, stewards over the Gospel, speaking faithfully the Word of God and they were not doing it to please men, because they knew that God tries the heart.

This sermon relates in its content primarily to me as a pastor. But every one of us are called to preach. Every one of us are called to be ministers. But in my preaching, in my teaching the Word of God, I’m not doing it to please men. I don’t preach to make you happy. I’ve had people ask me, “You’ve got all those people in your church; how do you keep them happy?” I don’t keep them happy. That’s not my job.

As a matter of fact, sometimes when I preach, I want you to be sad, because if sin is mentioned and found in your heart, it’s not a happy thought. If you’re in disobedience to God and the preaching of the Word hits you right between the eyes or convicts you of your sin and you’re sad, that’s good. But “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” We have to

properly diagnose the problem to be able to give you the remedy, which is the Gospel. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." "There is none righteous, no, not one."

So coming to church is not about a sermon that makes you feel good. "Oh, he's so good. Oh, I love his humor. He's such a great speaker." But rather ask, is he Biblical? Is he truthful? Is he accurate in preaching the Word of God? Does it bring conviction? Does it reprove? Does it rebuke? Does it exhort? Does he preach with longsuffering and doctrine? Or does it just tickle your ears?

Some people go to church based on the preacher telling them what they want to hear and not what the Bible says. I have no interest in pastoring a church where people come to know what they want to know. I want them to know what God says in His Word. I'm not here to make you happy and to feel good. I love you and hope the ministry of the Word blesses you and encourages you. But it's not about you; it's about God. When I get to heaven, He's the one I'm going to answer to—not you. He's the one I have to give an account to. I want Him to say to me, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant....Enter into the joy of your Lord." What motivates me in my preaching is not a desire to please men, but to please God, who tries the hearts. So the pastor is to be a faithful steward of the mysteries of God.

In 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, Paul says, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful." That's the number one requirement: faithful over the ministry of the Word that God has given to you. You are to be called by God, commissioned by God, entrusted by God and faithful to God, speaking to please God. Every minister should have a God-centered, God-focused ministry. That's what it's all about.

And being a faithful steward means that I don't add to the Bible, I don't take away from the Bible, I don't change the Bible or substitute for the Bible. I give the Word of God—nothing more and nothing less.

One of my favorite books I discovered years ago on preaching is by John R.W. Stott called *The Preacher's Portrait*. In that book, he gives different pictures from the New Testament of the preacher. One of the chapters is on our subject, the preacher as a steward. He uses this homely illustration:

"The Englishman's favorite breakfast dish is eggs and bacon. We will suppose that a certain household is issued a steward with eggs and bacon and instructions to dispense them to the household for breakfast on four successive mornings. On Monday morning, the steward threw them into the garbage can and gave them fish instead. That is contradiction, and the master was angry. On Tuesday morning, he gave them eggs only but not bacon. That is subtraction, and the master was angry again. On Wednesday morning, he gave them eggs, bacon and sausage. That is addition, and his master was still angry. But in the end on Thursday morning, he gave them eggs and bacon—nothing else, nothing less, nothing more—and his master was well pleased with him at last."

I like that. Nothing more and nothing less, just dispensing to the household of God the nourishment of God's Word, which He has commissioned to the pastor.

In 2 Timothy 4:1-5, Paul told Timothy, "I charge you..."—a solemn oath—"...therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word!" It's about the Word; not around the Word, not from the Word. Preach the Word. "Be ready in season and out of season." And Paul would have told Timothy how to preach the Word: "Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." And Paul tells Timothy why: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you..."—"Timothy"—"...be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." So Paul charged Pastor Timothy to preach the Word—nothing more, nothing less.

I like the New Living Translation of 1 Thessalonians 2:4: "For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts."

The fifth quality of a faithful minister is he is motivated by God's knowledge, verse 5. They know that God looks at their heart, and that's what motivates them. "For neither at any time..."—or "never"—"...did we use flattering words, as you know..."—or "it's a fact"—"...nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness." So they never, ever used flattery. Flattery is speech that molds a person into a false sense of security, so the speaker can gain a selfish, desired end.

And a "cloak of covetousness" is putting on a mask to cover up one's greed. They put on a mask of being spiritual, being a man of God or a preacher of the Word. But what they want is money. Nine out of ten of their sermons are talking about the blessings of Abraham from Galatians. Abraham was rich and had many servants. He also had a lot of livestock. They say that God wants to bless you and make you rich. But the blessings of Abraham are talking about justification by faith. It's not talking about cars, goats, money or physical wealth. So they take that statement and promulgate their phony doctrine of the wealth of the believer when it is not taught in Scripture.

Nobody wants to come to church and hear that God might want you to be poor for the kingdom of God's sake. Everyone wants to hear a sermon that God wants you rich, God wants you healthy, God wants you wealthy. The crowds flock to that. They want their ears tickled.

The Bible says in 1 Timothy 6:5 that the false teachers preached that "godliness is a means of gain." Paul said that's not true. He said, "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content," verses 6-8. There's not a lot of preaching on these verses.

So the false teachers put a mask of spirituality on, and it's a cloak of covetousness. When we know that God sees the heart, we don't do that. We fear God.

The sixth and last characteristic of a faithful pastor or minister is they seek the glory of God, not of men, verse 6. They seek to please God, not man. They seek the glory of God, not of man. "Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others." So Paul said they weren't seeking glory from men, but it's inferred that they were seeking the glory of God.

Nor were they burdensome on the Thessalonians, even though "we might have made demands as apostles of Christ." Paul will talk more about this when he likens the pastor to a mother and to a father.

But Paul closes this section, in verse 6, with the statement, "Nor did we seek glory from men." All true ministry must be done in the power of God, according to the Word and the will of God and all for the glory of God. Everything we do in ministry—whether you're a pastor or a lay person, it doesn't matter; we're all called to be ministers—is all to be done for one purpose, and one purpose only: God gets all the glory.

"To God be the glory;

Great things He hath done!"