

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 – Paul’s Defense and Thanksgiving

I. Review

- A. 1-2 Thessalonians were, after Galatians, the first canonical letters of Paul (written appr. 50 AD) and, therefore, are among the earliest books in the New Testament. Paul founded the Thessalonian church during his second missionary journey (see Acts 17:1-4).
- B. 1 Thess 1:1-10 – Paul thanks God for the faith, hope, and love, of the Thessalonians, making them examples to all the churches in Macedonia (Northern Greece).

II. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 – Paul’s Apostolic Defense

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. (1 Thess 2:1-12)

1. What are the different defenses Paul gives for claiming that boldness marked his apostolic ministry (vv. 1-2)?
2. Where did Paul’s boldness come from? What action(s) is involved in being “bold” according to Scripture? Where should boldness come from for you?
3. Does Paul’s defense of his ministry in vv. 3-4 implicitly command Christians to do anything? If so, what? How are we often pleasing man by what we *don’t* do?

"He tells everyone else to keep quiet while his man is saying something, and praises him when he is listening, and if he should pause, adds an approving "You're right!" If he makes a tasteless joke, he laughs at it and pushes his cloak into his mouth to show he can't contain his laughter." - Theophrastus, Characters, 2:1-13, describing a flatterer trying to impress someone of importance (written approx. 320 BC)

"...those who hunt for the applause of men cannot serve Christ... [T]hose who resolve to serve Christ faithfully, must have boldness to despise the favour of men." - John Calvin. Galatians. 26.

BUT... *"Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved."* (1 Cor 10:32-33)

III. 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 – Paul's Second Thanksgiving

And we also thank God constantly for this, that 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. ¹⁴ 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, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind ¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved--so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last! (1 Thess 2:13-16)

1. What does the grammatical parallel between "word of men" and "word of God" (v. 13) say about the preached word of God (insofar as it is derivative of the Bible)? Do you think about this in Sunday worship?

"Wherefore when this Word is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful; . . . the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; who, although he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God abides true and good."

- Second Helvetic Confession 1 (1566), referring to 1 Thess 2:13

[A Reformed pastor] *"knows that the Lord is consecrating to himself the mouth and tongue of a mere man in order to cause to resound through the preaching the very voice of the Savior himself. What our generation needs is not a company of communicators, of clever speakers, of effective orators, of interesting teachers, but a company of proclaimers of the everlasting gospel in all its richness and comprehensiveness."*

- JR deWitt. *What is the Reformed Faith?*. 20.

2. How were you convinced that the Bible is the Word of God? What is our ultimate grounds for accepting the Bible as the Word of God? How does this come about for one person and not for another?

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to a high and reverent esteem for the Holy Scripture. The heavenly character of its content, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of its style, the agreement of all its parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full disclosure it makes of the only way of man's salvation, its many other incomparable excellencies, and its entire perfection, are arguments by which it gives abundant evidence that it is the Word of God. Nevertheless, our full persuasion and assurance of its infallible truth and divine authority is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

- Westminster Confession of Faith 1.1

And we also thank God constantly for this, that 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. (1 Thess 2:13)