

# 1 Thessalonians 2 - Paul Recalls Visit to Thessalonica, Their Response

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## 1 Thessalonians 2

- (3) Defense of the legitimacy of Paul's ministry to the Thessalonians (2:1-16)
  - (A) How the gospel was to be delivered to the Thessalonians (2:1-12)
    - (a) Paul generally enumerates the charges (2:1-2)
      - (i) Paul's ministry message (2:1)

**1** For you yourselves know, **brothers and sisters**, that our reception among you was not in vain,

**1** For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,

1 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a waste of time.

1 For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

- "...brothers *and sisters*" - "brethren"; refers to believers, both Jews and Gentiles. The church in Thessalonica was comprised of mostly Gentiles, with a few Jews among them (see notes on 2:17).

- Paul stresses again that their conversion to Christ was not in vain

(ii) Paul's ministry motives (2:2a)

(iii) Paul's ministry methods (2:2b)

2 but after we had already suffered and been treated abusively in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God **amid much opposition**.

2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

2 As you know, we suffered persecution and were mistreated in Philippi. Yet we were encouraged by our God to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.

2 But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

- Paul now argues that his motives were pure. He didn't end up in Thessalonica seeking popularity or for some sort of personal gain.

— The reason Paul ended up in Thessalonica was because he was mistreated in Philippi. His motives for being in Thessalonica could not have been comfort and luxury because the reason he was there was because of the discomfort and lack of luxury that he experienced in Philippi.

- "...amid much opposition" - Paul tells them that he actually suffered while he was with them ministering in Thessalonica

(b) Paul expounds upon the inadequacy of the charges (2:3-12)

(i) Paul's ministry message (2:3-4)

3 For our exhortation does not *come from error* or impurity or by way of **deceit**;

3 For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit;

3 For our appeal to you does not spring from deceit, impure motives, or trickery.

3 For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

- Paul says, I did not come in a deceitful or erroneous way, but rather as one who was entrusted by God (v4) with the message of the gospel

*The most dangerous kind of preaching is that which is mostly true.*

4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not intending to please people, **but to please God**, who examines our hearts.

4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.

4 Rather, because we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, we speak as we do, not trying to please people but God, who tests our motives.

**4** But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

- Paul's message to them was not designed to "tickle their ears"; he didn't bring them a man-pleasing message, he brought them the gospel

- "...but *to please* God" - ministry is about pleasing a audience of One: God. We have no ability to control the reaction of people. The only thing we have the ability to control in ministry is that my message and lifestyle line up with what God says.

— All God wants at the end of the day from me and my ministry is to be found faithful. In the Parable of the Talents, the master did not say "Well done my good and *successful* servant." He said, "Well done my good and *faithful* servant" (Cf. 1 Cor 4:2).

#### (ii) Paul's ministry motives (2:5-8)

5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—**God is our witness—**

5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness—

5 As you know, we did not come with flattering words or with a scheme to make money. God is our witness!

5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

- Paul didn't come to the Thessalonians with flattering speech or to enrich himself, as the philosophers would often do. He didn't come to create a following through elevated oratory or with a gospel of works.

- "...God is *our* witness" - Paul invokes God as his witness to what he is saying, because God is the "heart knower" (v4)

6 nor did we seek honor from people, either from you or from others, though **we could have asserted our authority as apostles** of Christ.

6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

6 We did not seek praise from people—from you or from anyone else—

6 Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

- "...we could have asserted our authority as apostles" - Paul brings up a subject here that he will expand upon in his second epistle: the right to receive financing for your ministry (Cf. Luke 10:7; Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17-18)

7 But we proved to be gentle among you. **As a nursing *mother* tenderly cares** for her own children,

7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children.

7 even though as apostles of the Messiah we might have made such demands. Instead, we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own children.

7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

- Paul says that when he was with them, he was like their mother, gently nurturing and caring for them spiritually, as a mom would for her children

8 in the same way we had a fond affection for you and were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

8 We cared so deeply for you that we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but our very lives. That is how dear you were to us.

8 So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

- Paul says we loved you, we had a fond affection for you, and we gave you the very best that we had, which was the gospel

— Paul is arguing that because they knew what he is saying here is true, how could they doubt his motives

### (iii) Paul's ministry methods (2:9-12)

9 For you recall, brothers *and sisters*, our labor and hardship: *it was by* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, *that* we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

9 Brothers, you remember our labor and toil. We worked night and day so that we would not become a burden to any of you while we proclaimed the gospel of God to you.

9 For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

- Since Paul forfeited his right to receive financial compensation from the Thessalonians, he had to support himself through manual labor (Cf. 2 Thess 3:8)

— Paul told the Thessalonians, I don't want your money. I have a burning desire to preach the gospel to you, and I don't want me taking financial assistance from you to cloud that message in any way, shape or form. I will work a side hustle (tent making) to support myself financially (Cf. Acts 18:3).

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly and rightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;

10 You and God are witnesses of how pure, honest, and blameless our conduct was among you who believe.

**10** Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

- Paul says that our conduct while we were among you was beyond reproach

— It's a reminder of what Paul later told young Timothy concerning the purity of spiritual leaders within the church (1 Tim 5:1-2). This is an example of how Paul acted when he was with them...his conduct was blameless.

— Thus, any accusation against Paul that his ministry methods were impure were simply false...the Thessalonians knew it, and God knew it

11 just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children,

11 just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children,

11 You know very well that we treated each of you the way a father treats his children.

11 As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,

- Paul says that when I was with you, I basically acted like your father; in v7, Paul compared his relationship to the Thessalonians as a "nursing mother"

12 so that you would **walk** in a manner worthy of the God who calls you **into** His own **kingdom** and **glory**.

12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

12 We comforted and encouraged you, urging you to live in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His Kingdom and glory.

- "...walk" - Paul was not interested in just getting the gospel to people to be saved, although no doubt that is the first and most important step

- He was also interested in their "walk" after they came to Christ, that they would walk "in a manner worthy of God" (sanctification). While Paul was with them in Thessalonica, his goal was to create in them, by God's power, a walk that is worthy of their destiny (the kingdom).

- "...into" - *eis*, better translated "unto"; since believers on earth are not yet in glory, the whole expression is proleptical (a representation of something future as if it already existed or had occurred) [E.R. Craven]

- Our glorification is so certain that Rom 8:29-30 speak of it in the past tense. In the same way, the coming messianic kingdom is so certain that Paul here can speak of it as if it's a present reality.

- "...kingdom" - notice how "kingdom" is connected to "glory" (our glorification). Our glorification is yet future, at the moment we either die or are raptured.

- This is the Granville-Sharp Rule: a Greek scholar (every first year Greek student knows this rule!) in the 1800s. The rule is this: when you have two nouns of the same parsing, joined by a conjunction, if there is a definite article ("the") in front of the first noun, with no other subsequent definite article, then the two nouns are equal (referring to the same concept).

- So whatever you do with "glory" in this verse, you also have to do with "kingdom"; whatever is true about "glory" in this verse is also true about "kingdom"

- The point of the verse is to instruct the believer to walk worthy of the kingdom that you'll inhabit one day in the future, because we're living in Satan's domain

- Paul uses this same grammatical construction in Titus 2:13, and we use the Granville-Sharp Rule to equate that Jesus is both our Savior and our Lord.

- "...glory" - our glorification, the third tense of our salvation

- Paul's point by connecting "kingdom" and "glory" is not to make a statement of when the kingdom will come, although he does that by accident, but to tell the Thessalonians to act like someone who belongs to a higher kingdom, because you do.

- Paul wanted them to reflect kingdom values on the earth, since they were citizens of the kingdom, despite the fact that they won't enter the kingdom until later (Cf. 2 Cor 5:20)

- Kingdom Now theologians use this verse to state that since we're in the kingdom now, so we need to walk worthy of our place in that kingdom

- But to interpret this verse properly, we cannot just focus on the word "kingdom"; we also must focus on the word "glory," as this word helps interpret the meaning of the term

"kingdom."

— We have not been glorified yet; glorification is always portrayed for the believer in Scripture as a future reality. Since this is true, we must interpret "kingdom" in the same futuristic context

— A futuristic kingdom here is a solid interpretation because the kingdom is pictured as future throughout Scripture, both OT and NT. A futuristic kingdom aligns perfectly with the rest of Scripture. A present kingdom, on the other hand, does not align at all with prior revelation.

This verse teaches that a knowledge of the future (study of biblical prophecy) shapes one's behavior in the present. Many people will say that eschatology has no value to a Christian today. But eschatology has a tremendous value to the believer because it shows us what priorities matter to God. Once I know from God what will happen in the future, I can organize my life accordingly (Cf. 1 Cor 4:20; see notes on 2 Peter 3:10-11).

(B) The genuineness of the Thessalonians' conversion (2:13-16)

(a) They received the message as from God (2:13)

**13** For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you **received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of mere men, but as what it really is, the word of God**, which also is **at work in you** who believe.

**13** For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not as the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

**13** Here is another reason why we constantly give thanks to God: When you received God's word, which you heard from us, you did not accept it as the word of humans but for what it really is—the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

**13** 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.

- "...received" - a synonym for "believed"; often used as a synonym for belief (John 1:12). A person doesn't have to "receive" Jesus then "believe" Jesus...they are the same thing and are used the same way in Scripture.

- "...the word of God" - it is the Word of God that creates within people an awareness that they need to receive Christ. You cannot get someone to put their belief and trust in Christ through philosophy, gimmickry, or even through apologetics.

— Ultimately it is not an apologetic argument that leads someone to Christ. Apologetics might remove a doubt someone has so that they will be in a position to put their trust in

Christ, but apologetics alone will never lead someone to salvation (Cf. Luke 16:27-31; Rom 10:17; 2 Tim 3:15; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23).

- "...which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not as the word of *mere* men, but as what it really is, the word of God" - this is a tremendous statement on Bibliology. You can find a lot of verses in the NT that validates the OT as the Word of God, but you can't find a lot of NT verses that validate the NT as the Word of God.

— Paul is saying that when I spoke to you Thessalonians when I was with you, I gave you the Word of God, which was just as inspired and just as much the Word of God as the OT (Cf. 2 Peter 3:15-16)

- "...at work in you" - Paul says that it was obvious that the Thessalonians faith in Christ was real because the message changed their lives. They lived differently than before because the Word of God was at work in them to change their lives.

— We don't bring home a new baby, sit them on the floor, and tell them to help themselves to a ham sandwich if they are hungry. But this is the way we often treat new Christians because we don't help them understand that the same Word of God that brought them to saving faith in Christ is the same Word of God that they use to grow in Christ (Cf. 2 Tim 3:15—4:2).

(b) The Thessalonians had suffered from the hands of the Jews as well (2:14-15)

(i) The Judean believers (2:14)

14 For you, brothers *and* sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews,

14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews,

14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Judea that are in union with the Messiah Jesus. You suffered the same persecutions from the people of your own country as they did from those Jews

14 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

- Because the Thessalonians were baby Christians and going through persecution, many of them were falling for the lie that Jesus must not be true because He is supposed to make my life better, but I'm here suffering under persecution

— This is a very real spiritual attack that Satan loves to put into the mind of baby believers. He wants you to believe that because you're going through a hard time, you have fallen into



disfavor from God, you've lost your position in Christ, or somehow God's love is for everyone else except you.

— Paul tells them here that their suffering and persecution doesn't disprove their authentic Christianity...in fact, it proves that it is authentic. Your suffering doesn't disprove God's love for you, it proves the exact opposite.

- After Paul tells them that their suffering actual proves that they belong to Christ, he then tells them that their suffering enters them as part of an elite group, which includes Jesus Christ Himself.

— Paul begins to describe the other members of this elite group: first, the Judean believers, who were persecuted by their own countrymen (Jews who lived in Judea). The Thessalonians were undergoing the same experience as the Jews who lived in Thessalonica were persecuting them. The Thessalonian authorities had turned on the Thessalonian believers.

— When the Jerusalem church came into existence in Acts 2, it was the Jewish nation that turned against them. Paul says since the same thing happened to you, don't second guess whether you're really saved or not, and don't second guess whether your calling from God is true or not. Fact it, you're directly in God's calling.

Verses 15-16 contain a vitriolic outburst without parallel in Paul's writings.

(ii) Christ (2:15a)

(iii) The prophets (2:15b)

(iv) Paul and his companions (2:15c)

15 who both killed **the Lord Jesus** and **the prophets**, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all people,

15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men,

15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, who have persecuted us, and who please neither God nor any group of people,

15 Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

- "...the Lord Jesus" - the next member of this elite group that the Thessalonian church was part of through their sufferings was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ

— Jesus was the ultimate example of suffering; no one was more mistreated, slandered or mischaracterized than Jesus. He was rushed through the judicial system by the religious leaders, to get Him to the Romans, in order to crucify Him.

— Thus, the Thessalonians shouldn't think that just because they were mistreated, they missed God's calling on their lives.

- "...the prophets" - the next group that Paul calls out in this elite group are the prophets. The OT prophets were ignored and hated because essentially what they would do is file a *rîb* or "covenant lawsuit" against the kings because the kings were violating God's law.
- The kings never really wanted to hear what the prophets had to say, because they were in violation of God's laws. This is why all of these curses came upon Israel. But the kings had the political power, so when they got tired of the prophet, they would cancel the prophet.
- The kings would throw the prophet into a pit; they would cut the tongues out of the prophets. The king could get away with this because he was the king and had all the political power. The prophets couldn't do anything about it.
- If you were called by God to the office of prophet, you had a lot of problems and suffering coming your way (Cf. Matt 23:34-35). You could always tell how the nation was doing by how they treated the prophets. The closer the nation came to divine discipline, the worse they treated the prophets (Cf. 2 Chr 36:16).
- "...drove us out" - Paul now includes himself, along with Silas/Silvanus and the other twelve apostles
- Suffering and persecution drove Paul out of Philippi into Thessalonica, then after he was there for 6-12 months, suffering drove him out of Thessalonica and he went to Athens, then on to Corinth.
- The timing and direction of Paul's ministry was often driven by suffering and persecution (Cf. 1 Peter 4:12)

(c) The fate of the persecutors (2:16)

- 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always **reach the limit of their sins**. But wrath has come upon them fully.
- 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.
- 16 as they try to keep us from telling the gentiles how they can be saved. As a result, they are constantly adding to the number of sins they have committed. However, wrath has overtaken them at last!
- 16 Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins away: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.
- Notice the link between someone speaking and the Gentiles being saved. Humanitarian work is only a gateway into someone's life in order to give them the gospel. If you do humanitarian work without preaching the gospel to those you are serving, your work is in vain.

— The best evangelism is NEVER done without saying a word. Paul never shrank from preaching the gospel verbally; he didn't just allow his life to lead others to Christ, he allowed his mouth to do it. If you don't say something, people don't get saved.

— Why is this even debated? Because this is the mindset of the evangelical world that we're living in. You can do humanitarian work, and that is somehow a substitute for the gospel. It is not.

— This is a false gospel called the Social Gospel, which places meeting temporal human needs above preaching the gospel, if the gospel ever gets preached at all. The world loves humanitarian work, it will praise you all day for doing good humanitarian work, helping people. But if you open your mouth and begin speaking about the exclusivity of Jesus, there is little to no tolerance of that.

— God has designed the gospel message with *dynamis* (dynamite) power. This is His design for it (Rom 1:16-17). So when we preach it, it's not our power that penetrates the hearts and minds of unbelievers, it's God's power, through the Holy Spirit and the gospel message itself, that penetrates their hearts and convinces them to believe.

- "...reach the limit of their sins" - the wrath of God is being stored up, as water behind a dam, toward these persecutors (Cf. Gen 15:16; Rom 2:5)

— What were their sins?

(1) They rejected the gospel

(2) They hindered others from hearing the gospel

(3) Because they hindered others from hearing the gospel, they thwarted others from preaching the gospel

(4) Thus, they prevented people from being saved

- This is one of the problems that Jesus had with the Pharisees (Matt 23:13). They were shutting off the kingdom of heaven to people, hindering other people from hearing the gospel and thus, one day, enter the kingdom.

— It's one thing to reject the truth of God and be on a collision course with hell, which is bad enough, but it's another thing to put into motion, through persecution, the ability of others to hear the gospel so they can be saved (Cf. Rom 10:14-17).



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Kevin Young is a bigwig with the Gospel Coalition.

The Thessalonians' persecution lasted a long time, and so did their steadfastness. Some six years later Paul spoke of the churches of Macedonia (including Thessalonica) as enduring "a severe test of affliction" and continuing to give evidence of the reality of their faith in that "their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality" (2 Cor 8:1-2).

(4) Defense of Paul's concern for the Thessalonians (2:17—3:13)

(A) Paul's plans to visit them (2:17-18)

**17** But we, **brothers and sisters**, having been orphaned from you *by absence* for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were **all the more eager with great desire** to see your face.

**17** But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.

**17** Brothers, although we have been separated from you for a little while—in person but not in heart—we eagerly desire to see you again face to face.

**17** But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

- "...brothers *and sisters*" - "brethren"; it's important to understand that Paul is primarily writing to Gentile Christians in order to interpret this epistle accurately. He's clearly not addressing a small sub-group of believing Jews within the congregation at Thessalonica.
- Paul is using "brethren" here in the same sense that Jesus used it in Matt 12:46-50 (fellow believers), not in the sense that Paul used it in Rom 9:3 (where Paul calls fellow Jews his "countrymen")
- Paul explains the fact that he was orphaned from them—not in spirit, but in body. Paul says he was separated from them, not in a spiritual sense, just in a physical sense.
- "...all the more eager with great desire" - Paul used these strong words to convey his feelings, so that the Thessalonians wouldn't buy into the lie from the persecuting Jews that he left because he didn't care about them any more.

18 For we wanted to come to you—I, **Paul**, more than once—and Satan hindered us.

18 For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us.

18 That is why we wanted to come to you. Certainly I, Paul, wanted to come time and again, but Satan blocked our way.

18 Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

- Paul left Thessalonica because the unbelieving Jews drove him out. He then went to Athens, then on to Corinth, where he wrote this epistle, due to circumstances beyond his control.

— Paul says he tried, numerous times, to get back to Thessalonica to be with them, but Satan was stopping him

- "...I, Paul" - Paul asserts his own name, which he almost never does, to show the Thessalonians how personal this was to him

(B) Paul's concern for their glorification (2:19-20)

19 For who *is* our hope, or joy or crown of pride, in the presence of **our Lord Jesus at His coming**? Or *is it* not indeed you?

19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?

19 After all, who is our hope, joy, or reason for rejoicing in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? It is you, isn't it?

19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

- Paul looked at the Thessalonian believers as if they were the crown he will receive in heaven for allowing the Holy Spirit to use him to preach the gospel and teach them

- "...our Lord Jesus at His coming" - a reference to the Rapture

— Every chapter in 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to the coming of Christ (either the Rapture or the Second Coming)

20 For you are our glory and joy.

20 For you are our glory and joy.

20 Yes, you are our glory and joy!

20 For ye are our glory and joy.