

Session 3

An Exposition of I & II Thessalonians

I Thessalonians 2:1–9

Scriptures

I Thessalonians 2:1–2

I John 4:4

Revelations 19:16

John 14:23

Romans 8:37

I Thessalonians 2:3

I Thessalonians 2:4

Romans 16:18

I Thessalonians 2:5

John 8:18

I Thessalonians 2:6

John 5:44

Matthew 6:1

I Thessalonians 2:7

I John 3:14

I Thessalonians 2:8

Matthew 16:24

I John 3:16

John 15:13

I Thessalonians 2:9

I Thessalonians 2:1–2 For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

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.

The adversity that true saints are willing to endure to preach the gospel is a testimony to the sincerity of their faith. When tribulation and persecution arise for the Word's sake they will not, like impostors, abandon boldly holding forth the truth.

Hence, though Paul and his companions suffered and were shamefully entreated at Philippi, this did not prohibit them from continuing to boldly hold forth the Word of the Lord.

The influence and power of Christ's nature within His people undoubtedly is far greater than all the powers of darkness in this world

I John 4:4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

Benson Commentary, I John 4:4

The Son of God, who stands at the head of that interest in which you are embarked, and who aids you by the mighty communications of his Spirit, is infinitely too strong for Satan, the great head of the apostacy, and for all his confederates. Thus, the issue of the divine government will be, that truth and virtue shall be finally victorious over error and wickedness, because God, the Patron of truth and virtue, possesseth far greater power and wisdom than the evil spirits who promote error and wickedness.

In the third stanza of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" Martin Luther wrote, "And though this world, with devils filled, / Should threaten to undo us, / We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us."

If men are tempted to believe that Christ's power is less than Satan's, then let them consider that no devil or evil spirit ever cast out Jesus, but only He *them*. In the spiritual realm, there is but one King and it is not the god of this world. This is proven by how through Christ's name demons departed and by how in His name sinners are saved.

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, and because of His celestial authority, those called by His name will prevail. Thus, all victory for the people of God can be traced to the Spirit of Christ Who lives within them.

With respect to Jesus' current position in God's creation, the book of Revelation reveals this:

Revelations 19:16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, Rev. 19:16

"His name written on His vesture and on His thigh," was written partly on the vesture, partly on the thigh itself, at the part where in an equestrian figure the robe drops from the thigh. The thigh symbolizes Christ's humanity as having come, after the flesh, from the loins of David, and now appearing as the glorified "Son of man." On the other hand, His incommunicable divine name, "which no man knew," is on His head (Re 19:12), [Menochius].

KING OF KINGS—Compare Re 17:14, in contrast with Re 19:17, the beast being in attempted usurpation a king of kings, the ten kings delivering their kingdom to him.

When men ponder the events recorded in the book of Revelation and are tempted to become fearful of the power of the dragon or the beast or the ungodly world governments that will align themselves with them, they need to remember that He Who has died on the cross and was raised by God to sit at His right hand is vastly greater than all who oppose Him. The power of the Christian, therefore, lies not in his own human strength but in the divine authority given to the Son. And because Christ is supreme, in spiritual battle His people will prevail.

Benson Commentary, I John 4:4

Because greater is he that is in you — Namely, the Spirit of Christ; *than he* — The spirit of antichrist; *that is in the world* — The Son of God, who stands at the head of that interest in which you are embarked, and who aids you by the mighty communications of his Spirit, is infinitely too strong for Satan, the great head of the apostacy, and for all his confederates.

It is not a Christian's flesh or natural strength that allows him to overcome but rather the fact that both the Father and the Son abide in him.

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Because Christ is supreme and has been given divine power over all things by God, the saved are made more than conquerors through Him.

Romans 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

When this is properly understood, saints should realize that all victory lies in the fact that Christ's Spirit is the greatest spirit in the world today. And though the Holy Spirit may seem to be at times only a small part in the Christian heart, because God's presence lives within, the Lord's people will be made by God to become more than conquerors.

This is also why even an abundance of evil men could not dissuade or prohibit the apostles from fulfilling their divine commission, simply because Jesus Christ had appointed them as leaders of His own church, and nothing or no one inferior to Him could cause them to either depart from or desert their calling—teaching us that true spiritual boldness lies not in the strength of human will, not in the cleverness of human reasoning, but in the power and inward strengthening of the Holy Spirit.

It is God's power that causes His people to stand and God's power that enables weak men like ourselves to boldly proclaim the gospel, even when there are so many in the world who despise it.

Consider as well that believers are persecuted for proclaiming the truth because those who prefer the freedom to sin, have rejected the rule of God.

Thus, the greatest persecutors of faith will be seen to be those who most despise God's heavenly rule. Ultimately, any who cherish the right to sin will hate any who preach that men must be subject to God.

I Thessalonians 2:3 For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

Here Paul states that his ministry was not motivated by deceit, uncleanness, or guile. The apostle's real reason for ministry lay in his sincere belief that the gospel would produce fruit in those who believed it.

This is the intent of all true ministries, as they desire nothing more than that men believe the truth solely for their own benefit.

Because the apostles' motives were undefiled, they could openly encourage the Thessalonians to inspect their motives. In short, the apostles invited men to, in business terms, look at their books. They had nothing to hide, and they wanted all they preached Christ to, to know it.

I Thessalonians 2:4 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.

It is not a right but a privilege to be put in trust with the gospel. All true ministers serve at God's discretion and can be as easily removed from their divine positions as they were placed in them.

Adding to this is that when men of God have been allowed by God to be entrusted with the gospel, their sole loyalty and allegiance will always be to God since he who is called to serve the Lord cannot and will not seek to please man.

To do so would endanger his own godly designation. Thus, it is the imposter, not the true minister, whose main objective is to please the people he oversees.

No man also is more open to corruption than he who, instead of remaining faithful to the Lord, complies with the wishes and desires of sinful men. This is clearly seen in the Old Testament figure Aaron, who through external pressure from rebellious Israel, assisted them in making an idol to worship (Exod. 32:1–4). Because Aaron lacked sufficient godly character, he was compromised spiritually.

This record also teaches that no man can remain true to God if he can be compromised by anybody or anything apart from God. This must include, even those strong influences of his own heart.

Whenever men secretly desire the praise of other men, they will speak things that they believe will be pleasing to them. This speech, though it may contain selected bits of the truth, will never really be the truth. Simply because those who say things to please the hearer, seek really only to gain something for themselves.

Romans 16:18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Rom. 16:18

Serve not - Obey not. Though they are professedly, yet they are not his real friends and followers.

But their own belly - Their own "lusts;" their own private interests; they do this to obtain support. The authors of parties and divisions, in church and state, have this usually in view. It is for the indulgence of some earthly appetite; to obtain function or property; or to gratify the love of dominion.

And by good words - Mild, fair, plausible speeches; with an appearance of great sincerity, and regard for the truth; compare Colossians 2:4; 2 Peter 3:3. People who cause divisions commonly make great pretensions to peculiar love of truth and orthodoxy; and put on the appearance of great sincerity, sanctity, and humility.

And fair speeches - Greek εὐλογία *eulogias*, eulogy, praise, flattery. This is another very common art. "Flattery" is one of the most powerful means of forming parties in the church; and "a little special attention," or promise of an office, or commendation for talents or acquirements, will secure "many" to the purposes of party whom no regard for truth or orthodoxy could influence a moment.

Deceive the hearts of the simple - The minds of the unsuspecting, or those who are without guile τῶν ἀκάκων *tōn akakōn*. The apostle means to designate those who are simple-hearted, without any disposition to deceive others themselves, and of course without any suspicions of the "designs" of others. He has thus drawn the art of making parties with the hand of a master. First, there are smooth, plausible pretences, as of great love for truth. Then, an artful mingling of attentions and flatteries; and all this practiced on the minds of the unsuspecting, drawing their "hearts" and "affections" toward themselves. Happy would it have been if the art had been confined to his own times.

I Thessalonians 2:5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

One of the most prevalent ways of attempting to deceive the simple is through flattery. *Flattery* is defined by *Strong's* as saying things "with a view to advantage or gain"

Practically speaking, fraudulent ministries will often use flattery to increase their religious influence.

When also men do not possess any real spiritual power, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they must resort to flattery in order to gain religious influence.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 2:5

The word here rendered "flattering" - κολακείας *kolakeias* - occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The meaning is, that the apostle did not deal in the language of adulation; he did not praise them for their beauty, wealth, talent, or accomplishments, and conceal from them the painful truths about their guilt and danger. He stated simple truth - not refusing to commend people if truth would admit of it, and never hesitating to declare his honest convictions about their guilt and danger. One of the principal arts of the deceiver

on all subjects is flattery; and Paul says, that when preaching to the Thessalonians he had carefully avoided it. He now appeals to that fact as a proof of his own integrity.

Another point that Paul emphasizes to the Thessalonians is that he had not in any way, used his ministerial office for financial gain.

This dishonest practice was no doubt as prevalent in Paul's time as it is in ours, when men will hijack spiritual positions in the church for the primary purpose of gaining material wealth for themselves, hence, counterfeits often make merchandise of God's people, to fulfill their own carnal desire for worldly riches.

In contrast to this deceptive religious behavior, are those who are sincerely sent by the Lord, who ultimately call upon the Lord as a witness to their own spiritual genuineness.

True men of God, therefore, can call upon God as a witness of their spiritual ministries when in fact counterfeits cannot.

This is seen with Elijah and the prophets of Baal, Moses, and Korah, and even our Lord Jesus, whose earthly life and spiritual resurrection from the dead proved that what He had proclaimed about Himself, as coming from God, was true.

John 8:18 I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.

By asking the Lord for confirmation, the apostle could appeal to no greater power—since who better to confirm that we are pure Christians than He Who *makes* men Christians?

I Thessalonians 2:6 Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

Matthew Poole's Commentary, I Thess. 2:4

Ministers of the gospel are Christ's servants by office, and, as servants, they are to please their own Master. *If I pleased men*, saith Paul, *I should not be the servant of Christ*, Galatians 1:10. And this made the apostle have regard not only to his doctrine and outward conversation, but the inward aim and intentions of his heart, as knowing God tried his heart. And expecting the reward of his labours more from God than men, he therefore sought to please God rather than men, and approve his heart unto him. And herein he reflects upon those false apostles that sought to please men...

Perhaps unknown to the Thessalonians was the fact that if men seek glory one from another, this will disqualify them from believing in the one God sent to save them.

John 5:44 How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?

When men are therefore driven by the desire for human praise, true hope for possessing real faith in Christ is lost, since one cannot be controlled by a carnal nature, which seeks man's approval, and at the same time grow in any real faith in the Son of God.

The glory also that people choose to pursue, whether it is worldly or heavenly, ultimately determines if true faith in Christ can ever be possessed.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, John 5:44

A man cannot believe the gospel while he is wholly under the influence of ambition.

Expositor's Greek Testament, John 5:44

The Jewish inability to believe arose from their earthly ambition: πῶς δύνασθε ... οὐ ζητεῖτε. The root of their unbelief was their earthly idea of glory, what they could win or bestow. This incapacitated them from seeing the glory of Christ, which was divine and heavenly, which men could not give or remove.

Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, John 5:44

How can ye believe] The emphasis is on 'ye.' How is it possible, for you, who care only for the glory that man bestows, to believe on One who rejects such glory. This is the climax of Christ's accusation. They have reduced themselves to such a condition that they cannot believe. They must change their whole view and manner of life before they can do so...

Ultimately, when religious acts are performed for the sole purpose of gaining human approval, then all heavenly reward will be lost.

Matthew 6:1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Matt. 6:1

To be seen of them.—It is the motive, and not the fact of publicity, that vitiates the action. The high ideal of the disciple of Christ is to let his light shine “before men” (the self-same words are used in Matthew 5:16 as here), and yet to be indifferent to their praise or even their opinion. In most religious men there is probably a mingling of the two motives, and we dare not say at what precise stage the presence of the lower overpowers the higher. It is enough to remember that it is the little speck which may taint the whole character till it loses all its life.

How shortsighted are any who instead of seeking the highest glory, which is spiritual and originates from above, foolishly seek the shallow and dissipating fame of sinners like themselves? Such also is the effect of sin, which so weakens men's mental powers that the wisdom to seek heavenly glory above human fame, is lost.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Eph. 4:18

Nothing is more obvious than that indulgence in sin weakens the mental powers, and renders them unfit for high intellectual effort. ... It follows, too, that as man has debased his “understanding” by sin, it is needful to make an exertion to elevate it again: and hence a large part of the efforts to save people must consist in patient “instruction.”

Because sinners cannot perceive the true glory of the Lord, they are left with pursuing the temporal and fading glory of a condemned world.

I Thessalonians 2:7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 2:7

But we were gentle among you - Instead of using authority, we used only the most kind and gentle methods to win you and to promote your peace and order. The word here rendered “nurse,” may mean any one who nurses a child, whether a mother or another person. It seems here to refer to a mother (compare 1 Thessalonians 2:11), and the idea is, that the apostle felt for them the affectionate solicitude which a mother does for the child at her breast.

Throughout the book of Thessalonians Paul reiterates his great affection for these early believers of Christ. Because the Thessalonians exhibited such a pure and sincere love for the Savior, the apostle sought to do nothing to discourage them in their faith.

Observe as well, that when men are true ministers of the gospel, they will care for God's people as their own. This is why, though sinners love their own, only those who are themselves born of God will love the children of God.

Consequently, if a man is born again and has God's Holy Spirit in him, God's spiritual children will be where his greatest loyalty lies. The proof also that men have passed from death unto life can be seen when love for their spiritual brethren emerges.

I John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

It is when divine love for the brethren is present, that we are assured by God, that eternal life is possessed. Yet, if a man does not love those born of God, it is certain that he remains dead in sins himself.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 3:14

He that loveth not his brother abideth in death - He remains dead in sins; that is, he has never been converted. Compare the notes at 1 John 3:6. As love to the Christian brotherhood is essential to true piety, it follows that he who has not that remains unconverted, or is in a state of spiritual death. He is by nature dead in sin, and unless he has evidence that he is brought out of that state, he "remains" or "abides" in it.

I Thessalonians 2:8 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.

True love for the Lord's people extends far beyond religious duty and will include a spiritual willingness to lay down our lives for them.

Because the Thessalonians were precious in God's sight, the apostles were more than willing to give them all they could. This went beyond simply preaching the Word but included laying down their own lives for them.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 2:8

Not the gospel of God only - To be willing to communicate the knowledge of the gospel was in itself a strong proof of love, even if it were attended with no self-denial or hazard in doing it. We evince a decided love for a man when we tell him of the way of salvation, and urge him to accept of it. We show strong interest for one who is in danger, when we tell him of a way of escape, or for one who is sick, when we tell him of a medicine that will restore him; but we manifest a much higher love when we tell a lost and ruined sinner of the way in which he may be saved. There is no method in which we can show so strong an interest in our fellow-men, and so much true benevolence for them, as to go to them and tell them of the way by which they may be rescued from everlasting ruin.

But also our own souls - Or rather "lives" - ψυχὰς *psuchas*; Matthew 6:25; Matthew 20:28; Luke 12:22, Luke 12:13; Mark 3:4. This does not mean that the apostle was willing to be damned, or to lose his soul in order to save them, but that if it had been necessary he would have been ready to lay down his life;

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 3:16

The spirit which led the Saviour to sacrifice his life for the good of the church, should lead us to do the same thing for our brethren if circumstances should require it. That this is a correct principle no one can doubt; for:

The Dead Shall Rise: Session 3

- (1) the Saviour did it, and we are bound to imitate his example, and to possess his spirit;
- (2) the prophets, apostles, and martyrs did it, laying down their lives in the cause of truth, and for the good of the church and the world; and,
- (3) it has always been held that it is right and proper, in certain circumstances, for a man to lay down his life for the good of others.

This selflessness of laying down one's life for others is the mark of a true Christian.

Matthew 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

This is how Jesus manifested God's love towards us, and this is how we are to manifest His love to the world.

I John 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

It is not enough to speak words of love if sacrifice is withheld even as it is not sufficient to say we love the people of God if we remain reluctant to lay down our lives for them.

True love must progress beyond simple words and include personal sacrifice.

John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

I Thessalonians 2:9 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.

The degree to which Paul labored among the Thessalonians shows us the cost he was willing to pay for their continued spiritual growth. By a man's walk, and not his words, is his religion proved. Hence, whereas good words and fair speeches can deceive the simple, actions and what men ultimately live for reveal who they really are.

When ministers also ask nothing from those they have been called to serve, we can know, that it is not themselves that they truly live for.

This also teaches us that those divinely sent by God will seek not what they can gain from others but only what they can give to them.