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1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

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English Standard Version

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## ***“The Mission Fulfilled”***

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> sermon in the series on 1 & 2 Thessalonians entitled,  
***“Life for the Long Haul.”***

### **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12**

*“For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed — God is witness. <sup>6</sup> Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. <sup>7</sup> But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. <sup>11</sup> For you know how, like a father with his children, <sup>12</sup> 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.”*

*Heavenly Father, we have come to Your Word again this morning and we find that we need some things that sound like they're beyond our ability. Which means that they can only come from You. So Lord, once again open our ears to truly hear and by the power of the Holy Spirit, open*

*our hearts and minds to understand and apply this word to our daily lives. Do this for each of us, this morning, in His name, and for His glory, Amen.*

### **INTRODUCTION: *The Driving Test***<sup>1</sup>

Read a unique article about a driving test. Anxiety and terror of this dreaded undertaking have driven many people to some pretty shaky test results. However, back in 2001, the effort of a 22-year-old man from the Netherlands may take the checkered flag for **worst driving test of all time**.

Our hero was motoring along with his examiner when he managed to get the wheels of his car stuck on a railroad track. (How he managed to do that is beyond me ... but, obviously, not beyond his ability.) Lo and behold, a train suddenly came chugging down the tracks. At this point, it would have been very interesting to see the look on the driving examiner's face.

Anyway, both men leaped from the vehicle just before the train, basically a moving wall of steel, smashed into the car, dragging the thing (formerly known as an automobile) several hundred yards down the track. The car, or what was left of it, spun off the train and landed on the tracks headed the other way. And unfortunately, the car then performed a boomerang maneuver as the train coming from the opposite direction **smashed** into it, and dragged it back the other way, where it spun off the front of that train, right in front of the two startled men!

Needless to say, our ace didn't pass his driving test.

During this season of your life, tests are things you would probably like to ship off on a train headed to Siberia. Yet, because they're an important measure of what you have learned (and because you have to take them or you would flunk out of school), you endure them. God also brings tests your way.

The present economic upheaval has caused a good deal of anxiety on the part of many people. It gets expressed in a variety of ways — anger, tears, fear, bad political choices, and so on and so forth.

Christians haven't escaped the negative effects of the downturn. Many believers I know have talked openly about such things as the erosion of their retirement accounts, trouble keeping up their mortgages, concern about whether or not they'll have a job next week, and the decline in giving that has affected most churches. It takes a tough time like this to cause us to perform a kind of spiritual gut-check: What do we really trust in ... for peace and a sense of wellbeing?

Where is our hope really lodged?

Is our hope in our economic security? Or is it in Jesus?

I think He's using this time to probe the heart — both yours and mine. He's allowing us to experience physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges.

You may experience pain. How should you respond?

You may experience joy. What do you do with that?

We pass these tests by first realizing that they have come through the hands of God. We look for what He is teaching us through them. Then, if we respond humbly before God, we can discover, as **1 Thessalonians 2:4** says, if "*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.*"

We must seek His strength in our weakness and give Him the glory for any success. We don't want to stand before our Eternal Examiner one day with a life story that resembles a train

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<sup>1</sup> The Introduction is adapted from the email newsletter *Campus Journal*, 10/5/01 and the email newsletter *Crosfigell*, by T.M. Moore, 5/15/09.

wreck.

Tests are part of life. And one who got tested more than most was the Apostle Paul. Remember, when he planted this church in Thessalonica, he wound up getting run out of town by an angry mob. And he's writing this letter, and in particular, this chapter, in response to that test, and in response to the consequences of that test. And so, with that in mind, let's continue our study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, which is teaching us about, "***Life for the Long Haul.***" But before we get too far into the chapter, let's remind ourselves about this church ...

**BACKGROUND: What was this test?** <sup>2</sup>

The church in Thessalonica was founded by the Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey in Acts 17, and we know from this book that this was a church built on preaching and teaching of sound doctrine and nurtured with a pastoral ministry of love and devotion. Although it was filled with people who were less than perfect, nonetheless, it was a church where God's Spirit was at work.

However, the brief mission in Thessalonica had been brought to a crushing end. The public riot and the legal charges against the missionaries were so serious that they were persuaded to make a humiliating night flight from the city. Paul's critics took full advantage of his sudden disappearance. In order to undermine his authority and his gospel, they determined to discredit him. So they launched a malicious smear campaign. By studying Paul's self-defense it is possible for us to reconstruct their slanders. 'He ran away', they sneered, 'and hasn't been seen or heard of since. Obviously he's insincere, impelled by the false motives. He's just one more of those phony teachers who tramp up and down the coast of Greece. In a word, he's a fake. He's in it only for what he can get out of it in terms of sex, money, prestige, power, whatever. So when a little opposition arose, and he found himself in danger, he took off and ran away! He doesn't care about you Thessalonians; he's abandoned you! He's much more concerned about his own skin than your welfare.'

It seems likely that some of the Thessalonians were being carried away by this flood of abuse. The facts of Paul's abrupt departure and failure to return seemed to fit the accusations being made against him. His critics' case sounded pretty plausible. So Paul must have found this attack painful and personal. Paul determined to reply to the charges which were being leveled at him, not out of anger or vanity, but because the truth of the gospel and the future of the church were at stake.

And he starts by reminding them he came to them with a ...

**v. 1-2: BOLD DECLARATION**

*"For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.<sup>2</sup> 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."*

This word translated "***boldness***" means "to speak fearlessly and with courage." And Paul is trying to remind them that **they already know this** about Paul and Silas. He says essentially that **five times**.

In verse 1, he says, "***For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.***"

Verse 2, "***though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you***

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<sup>2</sup> The Background and the Exposition of the text are adapted from *The Gospel & The End of Time: The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* by Dr. John R. W. Stott, pages 45-54; *The Communicator's Commentary: 1, 2 Thessalonians / 1, 2 Timothy / Titus* by Gary Demarest, pages 50-59.

*know.*”

Verse 5, “*For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed — God is witness.*”

Verse 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.*”

And verse 10, “*You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.*”

In verse 2, he reminds them that “*we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi.*” Before reaching Thessalonica Paul had suffered both injury and insult in Philippi. He and Silas had been stripped, beaten, thrown into prison, and their feet fastened in the stocks. It had not only been an extremely painful experience, but humiliating as well, since they were flogged naked in public, without trial, and in spite of their Roman citizenship. In Thessalonica too Paul had met strong opposition. Yet these afflictions didn’t deter him. On the contrary, God gave him courage to go on preaching the gospel, whatever the consequences might be.

This, then, was the second evidence of Paul’s genuineness. He was prepared to suffer for what he believed in. Thus Paul appeals both to his openness and his sufferings as tokens of his **boldness** in **declaring** the Gospel. Far from being empty-handed on arrival in Thessalonica, with nothing to say or bring, Paul had had the courage to preach the gospel and risk further persecution.

Remember that Paul is responding to false accusations, “These people were arrested for being disloyal to Rome!” And so Paul openly refers to his Philippian experience. He has nothing to hide. He makes it clear that in the midst of conflict, Christian witness still goes forth ... he said, end of verse 2, “*we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.*”

The word translated “**boldness**”, as I said earlier, means “to speak fearlessly and with courage.” It needs more than one English word to capture its double meaning. It describes both “a lack of fear” and “a full confidence in the message itself.” Here are two additional signs of authentic evangelism.

The Good News of Jesus, the gospel, must always be proclaimed without fear. The greatest fear that most of us face when contemplating talking to others about Jesus is the fear, not of persecution, but of **rejection**. The fear of being regarded as foolish or stupid all too easily **paralyzes** us. The fear of not being accepted way too often **imprisons** us in silence.

Most of the time this kind of fear is grounded in a preoccupation with results. And in our calculation to produce results, we may distort the gospel, telling people what they want to hear in order to get a positive response. A desire to win more people to Christ and to bring more people into our church is certainly integral to the gospel. But our evangelism must be designed, not to get results, but to be “bold in our God” in sharing the story of the gospel. And then we are to leave the results to Him. It’s our job to get the Gospel in their heads, its God’s job to change their hearts.

At the same time, we can proclaim the gospel with complete confidence in its power and validity. It is “*the gospel of God.*” It’s not of human origin. It’s not something that was developed by men and women of great religious genius. It’s God’s plan for human salvation. It’s God’s way of bringing people into right relationships with Himself and with each other. We can trust this gospel of God to change our lives and change our relationships. And so we declare it with boldness.

The second thing Paul tells us about is, contrary to the false accusations being made about them, he and Silas came to them with a ...

**v. 3-6: SINCERE MOTIVATION**

*“For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed — God is witness.<sup>6</sup> Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.”*

Paul continues his defense against these accusations which were designed to discredit his ministry. At least three of them are confronted in these verses, all of them having to do with his motivation. Some had apparently accused Paul of being motivated by **error, impurity, and deceit**. Each of these is a serious charge, and together all three are overwhelming. However, evangelism could be practiced out of any or all of these motives.

The first accusation was that Paul was teaching **“error.”** The ultimate issue is always truth. The gospel is either true or it’s not. Paul stakes his entire life on the truth of the gospel. There’s a tendency in our day to judge values by the wrong standard. **“Does it work?”** is asked far more often than **“Is it true?”**

The test of the validity of the gospel is **truth** ... not pragmatism.

Evangelism must be deeply rooted in truth. The danger in preaching to attract an audience is obvious. It is too readily disguised to provide solutions that **work** rather than **truth** that is to be confronted. The acid test for every sermon, every Sunday School class, and every Bible Study must be: ***Is it true?***

If Christ is presented as a **means** by which we can be successful, happy, or whatever, we are betraying the gospel of God. We are guilty of **error** even though we may be successful in drawing followers.

The second charge refuted in verse 3 is **“impurity.”** Some versions use the word “uncleanness,” however the word used here refers primarily to **sexual immorality**. This accusation probably came from the leaders of the synagogue, for the culture around them was **flagrantly** promiscuous. The standards set forth in the Scriptures were certainly out of step with standards prevailing in the community. You’d think he was writing about today.

If Paul and his company could be discredited in this arena, the gospel could be rejected as another pagan religion. Cult prostitution was not uncommon in those religions, with sexuality being incorporated into the worship. Paul deals with sexuality more in-depth in 1 Thessalonians 4, but here he flat-out denies this accusation. Actually, his conversion to Christ raised his sexual standards, for Christ takes us beyond the letter to the spirit of the standards, **Matthew 5:27-30**, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.<sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.<sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”*

Who can ever be the same after Jesus’ teaching about adultery in the heart?

The third charge is that Paul was motivated by **“deceit.”** The word originally referred to catching a fish with bait, and thus came to mean any method of deception to trap or catch another. There is no place for manipulation or trickery in evangelism. Paul made that clear in **2**

**Corinthians 4:2**, “*But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.*”

Guile, craftiness, and cleverness had no place in Paul’s methods or ministry.

Having denied the allegations that his ministry was motivated by “**error or impurity or any attempt to deceive**,” Paul now defends himself by citing three specific examples in verses 4–6. These three verses call us to integrity in our own ministry and teaching.

Paul makes it clear that his ministry was not motivated by error or impurity or deceit, because, verse 4, “*we speak, not to please man, but to please God.*” To Paul, the ministry of preaching the gospel had been entrusted to him by God, and it was to God alone that he felt accountable. To speak in ways pleasing to men and women may well produce a growing congregation, but **the test** is whether or not we’re pleasing God. The classic description of what pleases God was given by the prophet Micah long ago, **Micah 6:7-8**, “*Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*”<sup>8</sup> *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to **do justice**, and to **love kindness**, and to **walk humbly with your God?***”

This is not to say that pleasing God will keep a congregation from growing. It does mean that there is something much more important than numerical growth or worldly success. We are called not to please people but God. If people are pleased by what is pleasing to God, there’ll be growth. But if they’re not pleased by what pleases God, the mandate is to please God no matter what happens.

Neither was their ministry guilty of deceit, verse 5, “*For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, **nor with a pretext for greed.***” The idea of flattery here is giving another a sense of comfort by speaking; however, it’s being done in order to achieve the speaker’s own ends. I’m going to say something that makes you feel good ... **because** I want you to do something for me. The “*pretext for greed*” then becomes the description of the speaker’s motive. Greed, some versions use the word “covetousness,” certainly includes the desire for money, but it embraces the whole attitude of always wanting more: more money, more power, more adulation, more recognition, just more! Preaching and teaching can become a means of luring people into our need for more. Preaching is a powerful force — for good or for evil. Paul appeals to God as his witness that his ministry had not been a cover to **use people** to enhance either his reputation or his bank account.

Nor had their ministry been involved in deceit because they didn’t seek glory from men, verse 6. Paul denies that he ever preached in order to receive glory from others. He wants them to know that it was all about the gospel.

The third thing Paul tells us about is, contrary to the false accusations being made about them, he and Silas came to them with lives demonstrated by ...

#### **v. 7-9: GENTLE WORK**

I have my own image of Paul, as I’m sure you do. My basic feelings about him for a long time were somewhat ominous. He seemed stern, unbending, unfeeling. I always thought that if Paul walked into my church, he’d start throwing people out for being half-hearted Christians. Or he’s throw me out. Or worse yet, he’d be calling in the youth group to carry a few out. If you’re not sure about that, look at Acts, chapter 5. Even though that was about the Apostle Peter, I’m sure it would be the same for the Apostle Paul.

And so I was astounded when I read these words, “*But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.*”<sup>8</sup> *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.*<sup>9</sup> *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.*”

Sure this is Paul we’re talking about here? Shipwreck guy? Beaten with 40 lashes guy? Church discipline guy? “*Gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children*”? I think what Paul is trying to do here is to contrast his apostolic authority with his pastoral ministry. And certainly the contrast between apostolic authority and a mother’s gentleness is pretty clear.

Paul adds that he was not only as gentle as a mother with them, but in verse 8, as affectionate and sacrificial too. Far from **using** them to minister to **himself**, he **gave** himself to minister to **them**. It’s quite a remarkable thing that a man as tough and masculine as the Apostle Paul should have used this feminine metaphor. Some Christian leaders become both self-centered and autocratic. The more their authority is challenged, the more they assert it. We all need to cultivate more of the gentleness, love, and self-sacrifice of a mother in teaching and ministry.

But then Paul changes the metaphor from mother to father. And in so doing, he mentions in verse 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.*”

It seems that Paul and his companions had deliberately worked night and day in order to avoid being financially dependent on the Thessalonian church. Probably they worked by day and preached by night. For Paul anyway (we don’t know about the others), we’re told in Acts 18 that his work was tent-making ... and presumably this is how he earned his living and paid for his room and board. So in these circumstances Paul could have made himself a burden to the Thessalonians by asking them for money, but he determined not to do so.

And Paul stays with the father metaphor in telling us, once again contrary to the false accusations being made about them, is that he and Silas came to them with lives demonstrated by ...

#### **v. 10-12: RIGHTEOUS CONDUCT**

*“You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.”*<sup>11</sup> *For you know how, like a father with his children,*<sup>12</sup> *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.”*

Paul now concludes his defense by appealing to the witness of the Thessalonians, and God as well, to the **integrity** of his behavior. He insists that his behavior, and that of his associates, was **holy, righteous, and blameless**. Whether he intended it or not, Paul gives us a concise definition of integrity. Holiness, justice, and purity are the ingredients of integrity. Whatever the charges leveled against Paul and his colleagues, he had nothing to fear because of the comprehensive quality of their behavior while they were in this church.

If Paul was gentle like a mother, he was also able to motivate like a father. Exhorting, encouraging, and charging were part of his ministry. The presence of encouraging between exhorting and charging is cause for reflection. I’ve done a lot of coaching. And I’ve done a lot of **exhorting**, though you may have thought it was merely yelling. Au contraire ... I was

### exhorting.

But you also have to encourage ... because when you're the one who's constantly being exhorted to do better ... well, it gets a little old after awhile. People need to be encouraged as well. If they do something well, make sure you point it out. And sometimes that means pointing out what they did well, even if things didn't go their way. If a player hits a sharp line drive, but the shortstop makes a diving catch, you can still let them know, "Hey, you hit the ball hard, that's what we're looking for. That kid made a great play. You keep hitting the ball like that and the hits will come." And it's no different for any other activity that demands dedication and practice. You need to exhort people to excel ... and you need to encourage them along the way.

And Christianity needs those same things as well. Spiritual growth doesn't come easy for most people. They have to keep working at it. And sometimes it seems impossible. The demands of discipleship are rigorous. To be a committed follower of Christ is always costly. Failure is a regular part of the Christian life —there is no such person as a perfect Christian. And so encouraging must always be in the midst of our ministry of exhorting and charging, preaching and teaching.

The goal of exhorting, encouraging, and charging is clearly stated in verse 12, "*to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*" Having been met by the grace of God, we want to walk in ways **worthy** of His love for us. God's call is rightly translated here in the present tense. God is always calling us, coming to us, loving us. That awareness makes walking "*in a manner worthy of God*" all the more urgent.

And God wants us to walk in a manner worthy of Him because He's calling us to **His kingdom and glory**. The two seem to be synonymous here. The kingdom of God was certainly the central theme of Jesus' teaching, deeply rooted in the Old Testament. The kingdom is more than a concept; it is a present reality. It is neither political nor geographic; it is something that happens within us as a church as we commit ourselves to God in Christ. The kingdom is here, and it's yet to come in its fullness. God is always calling us into His kingdom and glory.

We can be grateful to Paul's critics and attackers. In defending himself, Paul gives us a profound statement of what it means to share the gospel. He ties together the strands of bold declaration, sincere motivation, gentle work, and righteous conduct. To blend each of these into our sharing of the gospel will demonstrate faithfulness to the God who calls us into His kingdom and glory.

And all that is good to know. But it's hard to do.

And sometimes I think that we just don't get it. I think that about a lot of things ... both in the church and in the culture.

### **CONCLUSION: *Creative Truth Telling***<sup>3</sup>

One of the new movies coming out this month is *Angels & Demons*, based on the Dan Brown book of the same name. It's a sequel to the movie *The DaVinci Code*, also based on a book by Dan Brown. Though in the book series, *Angels & Demons* came first, in the movies, they've changed *Angels & Demons* into a sequel. All the early reviews pretty much say the second movie is as boring as the first one was — which is very unlike the books.

There's not nearly as much buzz this time around, partly because we're more familiar

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<sup>3</sup> The Conclusion is adapted from the sermons "*How to Be a Faithful Witness*" by Rev. Bruce Goettsche, Union Church of LaHarpe, IL, 5/21/06; "*Integrity*" by Rev. Jeffrey White, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, 1996; and "*On Sharing Your Own Soul*" by Dr. John Piper, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN, 9/15/85.

with the books and movies this time. But I think one of the main differences is that for *The DaVinci Code*, the claim was made that all of the historical and religious details **were true**.

In *The DaVinci Code*, midway through the book there is a charge that the church has pulled off the greatest hoax in history. The contention in the book, the movie (and now a host of copycat books) is that the Emperor Constantine “**created**” the Christian faith as we know it. He suppressed any documents of the church he didn’t agree with; He elevated Jesus to the status of God; and he hid the fact that Jesus was really married and had descendents that are living today.

If you do any checking of the facts, you find that all of these things ... **are wrong**. They’re **false**. They’re **untrue**. The books of the Bible were pretty much recognized by the time of Constantine. Additional “**gospels**” were not hidden; they were simply rejected as forgeries and as propaganda from a group called the Gnostics. As to the claim for the god-ness of Jesus; Jesus made those claims for Himself in the earliest verses of the gospels. Archaeology has unearthed copies of those gospels that predated Constantine by decades. The idea of Jesus being married has no evidence to support it.

And we’re seeing this trend of “**creative truth telling**” in many places today. Several newspaper writers have been caught fabricating stories. One of Oprah’s book club selections, *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey, was exposed as a largely fraudulent memoir. With the Internet people can plant falsehoods and distortions anytime they want and make it available to the world. However they, for the most part, can also fact-check those stories and reveal when things presented as truth, are, in fact, not true. In fact, they have websites set up that exclusively serve that purpose ... a place where people can check stories to see if they’re true or not.

Sometimes when people tell stories about me, I wish I had a website that would verify or deny the truth of those stories. I wonder if Paul would’ve wanted such a device in his day. He’s being attacked, false accusations are being made against him, and it’s hard to find out the truth. And so Paul reminds them of the truth in this letter. He refutes the accusations. And he says things like, verse 2, “*we had boldness in our God.*” Verse 3, “*our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive.*” Verse 5, “*For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed.*” Verse 6, “*Nor did we seek glory from people.*” Verse 7, “*we were gentle.*” Verse 8, “*we were ready to share with you.*” Verse 9, “*we worked night and day.*” Verse 10, “*our conduct was holy and righteous and blameless.*” Verse 12, “*we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you.*”

It sounds like Paul was on the up-and-up. He told the truth. He was sincere. He was gentle. He worked hard. And oh, don’t forget, he was “***holy and righteous and blameless.***” He’s completely confident and absolutely certain about his life and conduct. Sounds just like you and me.

Or ... maybe not. Do we tell the truth ... or sometimes do we engage in “creative truth telling”? I mean, there are a lot of days I can’t say that stuff. There are days I’m deceitful ... sometimes trying to deceive myself. That’s probably true for you too. There are days when I’m not very gentle ... with my wife, with my kids, with you. And my guess is that’s probably true of you too. And can we tell anyone ... ever ... that “*our conduct was holy and righteous and blameless*”? Sometimes, sure, but all the time? No way.

And when I get attacked, I don’t usually respond with a careful recitation of the facts. I want to fight back. But usually I have to face the facts that at least **some** of what’s being said is true. In fact, my whole life is a mixture of mixed motives, sometimes quite good and sometimes quite reprehensible ... sometimes at the same time. Now I’m not here to beat myself up. And

I'm not here to beat you up ... at least not very much. But I wonder how Paul can say stuff like this? I wonder how Paul got a **life** like that? And I wonder how I can get a life like that?

One thing I'm pretty sure of ... I don't think it comes easily.

I think it involves hard things like honesty and transparency and vulnerability and emotional pain ... lots of emotional pain.

Doesn't that sound like fun? Now why would I say that?

Paul says here in verse 8 that "*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.*"

I want to start and end there. There's a sense in this verse that part of the process of being holy is being committed to the community. In Paul's case, the community was the church in Thessalonica. In our case, the community is Potomac Hills Presbyterian Church. Now I don't mean that you have to do everything ... you can't ... there's already too many things going on for any one person to do. Now that doesn't get you off the hook for doing something. You need to find what you can do in the church ... and then do it.

But that's not really what Paul's getting at here. In being committed to the community I think he's being committed to honest relationships **with the people** of that community.

It's NOT just sharing the gospel. He says, "*we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves.*" I think we can translate sharing ourselves as sharing our **souls**. You've not shared your own soul when you have only shared information—even the most valuable information.

And it's NOT just working hard for someone. Verse 9 says this is part of what Paul gave "*For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day.*" But he worked among them as a friend, not an employee. The sharing of his soul was not just the sharing of information and not just a lot of hard work.

When you share your soul, you let a person in to see **what's really there**. You don't conceal your true feelings about things. A shared soul is a shared passion or a shared fear or a shared guilt or a shared longing or a shared joy.

Where the gospel flourishes, people share their own souls — their joy and guilt and fear and longing and passion and pain. You can see Paul doing that in this letter. We would do well to ask whether we are writing or speaking that way to anyone. **Are you sharing your soul with anyone?**

How did Paul say stuff like that? How did Paul get a life like that? How can you and I get a life like that? I think it starts with real truth-telling, with real people, in a real church ... and doing it over the long haul. After all, that's what Thessalonians is all about ... Life for the Long Haul.

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for the church in Thessalonica. May the lessons You gave them not be lost to us. Give us the faith, hope, and love that we might be able to share with each other not only the gospel of God but also our own selves.*

*We pray in the Name of Your Son, who lives, and reigns, and who's coming again. Amen.*

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**1 Peter 1:22-23**

*“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”*