

A Model Ministry
1 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Halifax: 6 August, 10:30 AM

Introduction

Today we are continuing our sermon series from Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians.

- We saw how he thanked God that there were Thessalonians who were now in the church that was in God the Father and Christ Jesus the Lord.
 - When we looked at that, I reminded you that we ought to be thankful whenever we see a church of God's people in any place—it is a marvellous thing to see,
 - for all would be lost and cut off from God but for the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

We also saw that there was an additional reason for Paul to thank God for this church!

- They, in particular, were an outstanding example of what a church ought to be.
 - Even though there had been severe opposition to the gospel when it was preached, these Thessalonian believers had received the Word with joy in the Holy Spirit!
 - They imitated Paul and his co-labourers, and as a result, became a marvellous example that was spoken about everywhere.
- What a model they are for us!
 - We cannot look at them without seeing how we have been cold toward our dear Lord and Saviour.
 - The Thessalonian believers are an inspiration to us of what we should aspire to be, and of what we will be if we learn to love Jesus and His gospel.

This week, we have another model presented to us—this time a model of ministry.

- Yes, I had some repenting to do as a minister of the gospel after spending a week of intense study in this passage.
 - By the way, it is 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 that we are looking at...
- It stings to have such excellent models, doesn't it?
 - But remember that if these models were not better than we are, they would not be models for us.
 - As models, they give us something to aim for by God's grace.
 - They show us what God can do in us if we put ourselves into Christ's hands.
 - As long as we walk in this world, we will always have models to aspire to emulate, and with God's help, we will make progress.

And let me add that in preaching about this model of ministry, I am mindful of the fact that most of you are not ministers of the gospel (we do have one visiting today).

- Therefore, in preaching about this, I would ask you to pray for me and for other ministers and to pray that God would raise up ministers who conform to this model...
- And in addition to that, I want you to know that I am going to apply this to you too because there are ways that you *are* ministers—or at least ought to be!
 - some of you are officers in the church, some of you have families to minister to, and all of you have peers to minister to.
- So you will see that this sermon is not directed just at pastors, but at all of you.

Please give careful attention now to the reading of God’s word—attention that is appropriate when hearing God’s own words given in mercy to us for our good.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12: For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. **2** But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. **3** For our exhortation *did not come* from error or uncleanness, nor *was it* in deceit. **4** But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. **5** For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God *is* witness. **6** Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. **7** But we were gentle among you,

just as a nursing *mother* cherishes her own children. **8** So, affectionately longing 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 dear to us. **9** For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. **10** You *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; **11** as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children, **12** that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy and infallible Word.

Notice how this passage begins.

- Paul declares that the ministry that he and his companions had was **not in vain**.
- That tells us the first thing about a godly ministry that I want you to consider...

I. Godly ministry in not exercised in vain.

A. “In vain” — what an awful thought!

1. Something that is done in vain is worthless—it is a pure waste.
 - a. There are two possible ways that ministry could be said to be in vain.
 - One is that the ministry itself was faithful, but produced no fruit.
 - The other is that the ministry itself was worthless—it failed because it was an unfaithful ministry and so can be said to be done in vain.
 - 1) In the first case, it would be like a farmer who plants a field and when the harvest day comes, he has nothing to show for it.
 - He was faithful in his labours, but there is nothing but barren ground—the labour he has expended was all in vain.
 - He may have done all that could be reasonably done, but perhaps his crop was destroyed by a hail storm or something.
 - 2) In the second case, it is that his farming itself is vain and worthless...
 - Perhaps he slept in when he should have been ploughing and didn’t get his crop in on time—and then when it needed to be watered or fertilized, he never got around to it—
- b. But Paul appeals to the Thessalonians to consider that the ministry that he had among them was not in vain in either way.

- They know that it wasn't because they became a model church...
 - And Paul is going to explain that one of the reasons for that was because of the way he and his coworkers had faithfully carried out their ministry.
- c. Some think that Paul feels a need to defend his ministry to the Thessalonians because he was being criticised for leaving so quickly...
 - But he never says a word about any kind of opposition.
 - He had that kind of opposition at Corinth and he speaks about it when he defends himself—but here he does not seem to be defending himself.
 - It seems rather that Paul is presenting his ministry as a model.
 - He is wanting to set before them how ministry is supposed to be done so that they can do ministry in this way.
 - But whether he is defending himself or presenting a model, the effect for us is the same—
 - In this passage we have a model of ministry given to us by the Holy Spirit that we ought to follow.
 - This is how ministry is supposed to be done.
- 2. Surely you do not want your ministry to others to be in vain!
 - a. You parents are ministers to your children.
 - What a tragedy it is for a Christian parent to have their children grow up only to realise that they have ministered to them in vain...
 - Perhaps they were focused on providing the best for them—but now realise they were so caught up in providing that they ignored them.
 - They have a fine home and fine education and lots of experiences, but that is all—there is no godliness in their lives.
 - All the effort has been in vain.
 - Or maybe the focus was on making them happy...
 - And now the parents realise that their children have no interest in serving others or in serving the Lord.
 - They only want to be entertained—they souls are empty and dead.
 - All those years of parenting have been in vain.
 - Or maybe there was rigid discipline, but no nurture in the love of Christ.
 - The children know how to work hard, but they have no heart for the Lord.
 - b. And what about a minister of a church...
 - At the end of his ministry he stands before God and realises that he has not imparted Christ to anyone in his ministry...
 - He had praise for being nice, or praise for being diligent—or maybe he had a life of ease and prosperity and felt he had it made...
 - but now he realises that all he has done has been worthless.
 - Perhaps he laboured in the word, but did not care for the people,
 - Perhaps he cared for the people, but compromised in his preaching, omitting what was offensive or unpopular...
 - Perhaps he never prayed.

- Perhaps he was a lazy slug—
 - But whatever he has done has all been in vain.
- c. And what about the person who is just a neighbour, but has no fruit.
- Maybe they have never sought to minister to others—they have lived for themselves without much concern for whether others follow God.
 - They simply did not care if their brothers in the church walked with God or not.
 - Their life has been lived in vain.
 - Maybe they have tried, but their own example or their harshness or something else has prevented them from imparting anything of eternal worth to another soul.
 - What a tragedy to have ministered in vain!
- B. Look now at the end of our text (in v. 12) to see what the goal of ministry is...
1. The goal of ministry is to influence others so that they would **walk worthy of God who calls them into His own kingdom and glory.**
 - a. What a lofty goal!
 - That we would influence others so that they would live the way those who have been called into His own kingdom and glory ought to live!
 - Just think of it—our glorious Creator in all His splendour and majesty has established a kingdom for us—for sinners like us!
 - We are able to come and live for Him—to behold His glory, to see the love in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the love they had from before the world began.
 - To know God and to become like God as those made in His image—to enter into an everlasting inheritance with Jesus Christ.
 - b. God’s call is a marvellous call—
 - Because it is a call that He provides what it calls us to obtain!
 - We are hopeless sinners, but God has sent His Son to save us...
 - In Him we are promised complete forgiveness of our sins...
 - In Him we are promised the power and grace to live a new life through the working of the Holy Spirit.
 - c. And again, the goal of ministry is that we would influence others to live worthy of this glorious calling...
 - We simply call people to come and to put themselves into Christ’s hands—to devote themselves to His care and to obey Him.
 - And He provides forgiveness and the Spirit that they might walk worthy of God.
 2. Do you not want to walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory?
 - Many of you love the Lord Jesus, and you do want that.
 - And don’t you also want to influence others to come to Him and to live for Him too? Surely you want your children to do that!

- Well if you are going to have a ministry that is not in vain—that bears that kind of fruit—
 - Paul spells out what must characterise your ministry.

TRANS> We will look at these characteristics under four headings.

- Pray that I will have these as a minister of the gospel, and pray that you will have them in the ministry that God has given to you.

II. The first thing that characterises ministry that is not in vain is *boldness*.

- Paul speaks of this in verse 2 & 3 where he says, **we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God.**

A. You are bold when God’s message of the gospel flows freely from you to others.

1. The word translated *bold* (*parresia*) literally means “all speech,” so it refers to speaking without holding anything back.

- It means you are someone who says what needs to be said for God.
- You say what you need to say, without trimming the message for any reason—so that nothing gets in the way of it.

2. For Paul and his fellow-ministers, the temptation would have been strong because, as he says, they had **suffered and been spitefully treated at Philippi.**

- After that, it would have been so easy—so natural—without even realising it—to alter the message just a bit so that it would not be as offensive.
 - Like so many ministries today, to add a little flattery—to turn the gospel, as so many do, into a social gospel—to make Jesus only an example and not a Saviour who had to be crucified to save us.
 - I have recently been countering a gospel that some have received that looks at people fundamentally as victims that need understanding rather than as sinners that need redemption.
 - It is a gospel that does not call for repentance.
- When you are rejected and abused for speaking the truth, it is easy to make a few adjustments—
 - And that is what a faithful ministry will not do—and what Paul and his companions would not do.

B. How it ruins our ministry when the pure gospel does not flow from us to others...

- When we distort it and pervert it in transmitting it so that something other than God’s message is heard.
 1. As Paul shows us, the message must not spring out of error—
 - This is where you are mistaken about what the word says—you have not been careful to speak according to God’s Word...
 2. The message must not spring out of uncleanness either...
 - This speaks of impurity of motive—
 - for example, a man who enjoys getting attention from the women by his ministry—or one who wants to be famous or impress people...
 - Such a man is sure to pervert the gospel if it interferes with his goals.
 3. And, the message must not be brought in deceit—where you are *trying* to mislead people.
 - This happens when you leave something out that you think they won’t like.

- Martin Luther pointed out that the thing that is most offensive in the day in which we live is the thing that needs to be emphasised the most.
- That is the point at which God's truth is being compromised.
- For example, today, people can't bear to be told that they are not to follow their own passions—and especially that their passions are sinful!
- But as long as people think their hearts and passions are good, they will never see or admit how much they need Christ to save them!

TRANS> Pray that the pure gospel will get to you through my ministry, and pray that it will get from you to others.

- We only wreck it when we alter it so that it does not bring life and beauty to those we try to minister to.

III. Now let's look at the second thing that characterises effective ministry—that it is done for God.

A. You have to realise that you are about God's business.

1. Paul and his friends kept in mind that God had approved them to be entrusted with the gospel (see verse 4) and that He was always evaluating their work.
 - They were there for Him.
 - He was the One who had called them, and it was His gospel that they had been given, not theirs to do whatever they wanted with!
 - As one fellow put it, this is sort of like being entrusted with someone's money.
 - You can't spend it however you please, but you are to spend it in the way that they want...
 - And with God, He is constantly observing how you are using His gospel—He is testing your heart as it says at the end of verse 4!
2. Listen, if the goal of ministry is, as we have seen, to influence others to walk worthy of God who has called them into His kingdom and grace,
 - how could you ever expect to do that if you are not doing your ministry with the intention of pleasing God?
 - Your whole life is to be lived for Him...
 - It is to be about pleasing Him instead of other people.

B. But it is so easy to forget that, isn't it?

1. The smile of other people is easier to see than the smile of God.
 - You can start out aiming to please Him and then, when you start to get some acclaim from others, shift your focus to pleasing people.
 - And your own corrupt heart will tend to gravitate to pleasing people because you can deceive them—they don't test your heart as God does.
 - How do you think that so many ministries get off track and start preaching a message that denies hell, that winks at sin, that suggests other ways to come to God besides the cross...
 - You can use a few flattering words, and they will be pleased with you...
 - People will always think you are quite a wise and discerning person when you tell them what great people they are.
 - They will declare what a great person you are, and they will give you the things you want—money, fame, respect, sexual favours!

- That kind of flattery is what Paul calls a cloak of covetousness.
 - You pretend that you are ministering, but in fact you are just trying to get what you want from them.
- 2. Think about that in your family.
 - If you are for God, you will speak to your family in accordance with what He says,
 - but if you are for yourself, you will not say the hard things to them for fear that they will not like you—or just because you don’t want to make trouble.
 - Those are reasons that parents don’t discipline their children, and those are reasons that churches don’t discipline their members.
 - They are not in it for God.
 - Therefore, they have very little impact for God.

TRANS> But this “living to please God and not man” can go all wrong too...

- It can be a posture that is assumed in a proud way—
 - We all know about harsh parents and harsh ministers who testify that they are making others toe the line for God!
 - They use the rod of God in anger, and as Proverbs tell us, the rod of anger will fail.
 - They are in fact frustrated individuals who have found a pious way to unleash their frustrations—a pious pretext that is—that it is all with zeal for God.

IV. The third characteristic of effective ministry is that it is exercised in tender care like that of a nursing mother.

A. What a helpful picture this is!

- Look at verse 6 & 7.
- 1. In verse 6, Paul says, **Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.**
 - He has just been showing how they were sent by Christ—they were approved by Him and examined by Him...
 - As those sent by Christ, they might have demanded to be honoured...
 - To have servants serving them and to have people kiss their feet.
 - They might have demanded fine meals and fine accommodations.
 - But how unlike Christ Himself they would have been if they had done that.
 - How unlike Christ are those who do that today.
 - How unlike Christ are parents who claim their God given authority as a reason to yell at their children—as giving them a right to be irritated with them just because they are the parents...
 - I am always trying to get parents in our day to learn to exercise their God-given authority,
 - but what a terrible thing it is when they turn that in an ugly occasion to exercise self-centered authority!
 - “I am the head of the home, and you have to do what I say!”
 - Paul did not do this.

2. Indeed, he gives us a very different picture in verse 7...
 - **7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.**
 - a. A nursing mother's goal is to nourish her child!
 - She wants to give that child what it needs to thrive.
 - Yes, she has full authority over that child,
 - but her authority has no airs about it—
 - It is not the ugly kind of authority that makes her strut around with great importance as one whose chief concern is to be respected by her babe.
 - She is gentle toward that little one.
 - She is there to provide it with what it needs to thrive—that is her focus and her goal.
 - b. And brothers and sisters, that was Paul's goal.
 - We have already seen what he wanted to give to those he ministered to—when we looked at verse 12...
 - He wanted them to learn to walk worthy of God who called them into His own kingdom of glory!
 - He wanted them come and live in the fullness of the gospel—of the calling they had from God to be His people!
 - He wanted them to draw on the resources that God had for them that would enable them to thrive in His kingdom!
 - He was not harsh with them—he was like a nursing mother!
 - He cherished them like she cherishes her own children—wanting to adorn them with the riches of the gospel!
 - c. Think about it fathers, mothers, husbands, officers of the church!
 - Answer me this one question...
 - Do you really cherish those God had placed under your care?
 - Don't answer too hastily that you do...
 - It is so easy to get busy *running things* and to forget that we are ministering to *people*!
 - We don't even love them or care for them—they are just tools that we get irritated with a lot when they don't do what we want and get in our way.
 - Do you need to repent of a cold irritated heart toward those you are supposed to be ministering to?
 - Did you forget that it is God that changes them and causes them to grow as you feed them from your breasts, as it were?

B. As a nursing mother, you are to pour out yourself for those under your care!

 1. If you affectionately long for them, you will want to do more than just feed them!
 - Look at what Paul says in verse 8: **So, affectionately longing 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 dear to us.**
 - a. A mother does a lot more than feed the babe that she is nursing.

- She gives herself in every way to the child—she changes diapers, she washes clothes, she bathes them, she comforts them, she hugs them.
- b. You can preach the gospel to people, but it must not end there!
 - The gospel testifies to the love of God in Christ—to how He gave Himself for us...
 - Those who minister the gospel not only have the privilege of telling what Christ has done, but also of showing what it means to pour out their lives for others!
 - This is a very difficult thing for us to do because we are selfish sinners, but if there is any affection from Christ, if any comfort from His love,
 - should we not learn to have the same mind and to esteem others as better than ourselves?
 - c. Let me ask you a searching question...
 - Do you affectionately long for the people you minister to? Have they become dear to you?
 - Would your children say that they were very dear to you?
 - Would your wife say that?
 - Would the other members in the church say that about you?
 - This is painful—I told you that it stings...but this is the model that God has given to us!
 - Ask Him to forgive you.
 - Pray for grace—for you, and especially for me as a minister of the gospel!
 - I have a stricter judgment that I will face.
- 2. Paul is able to testify of how his affection for the Thessalonian believers was seen—how he and his companions in ministry poured out their lives for them...
 - **Verse 9: For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.**
 - See how he points to this as something they would remember!
 - From what we can tell, Paul was a leather worker who made tents and things of leather...
 - And when he went places, he actually taught people while he was working—they came to his workplace and he ministered to them.
 - There were three missionaries, and when Paul was ministering in a new place, he did not want anyone to think he was there for money.
 - Instead of receiving support from them, he worked with his hands to provide for himself and he received support from other churches that wanted the gospel to go forth.
 - That is one of the reasons we have an offering box at the back instead of passing a plate.
 - If people who need to hear the gospel come here, we do not want them to think they need to pay—the same thing with counselling.

- We are here to serve, not to be served.
- Ministers should be willing to provide for themselves if necessary.
 - That is what we see in the example of Paul.
 - They should give of themselves to the people in love—they should lay down their lives for them.
 - They must be willing to give of their time—to labour night and day for the kingdom of God.
 - Though he does not mention it specifically here, one of the ways that Paul did that was in his constant prayers for them.

TRANS> The whole driving force behind all of this is the affectionate longing that those who minister ought to have for those to whom they minister.

- They love them and they want to be a blessing to them
- But it is not just the love of a nursing mother that should be evident...

V. The fourth characteristic of effective ministry is that is done with the integrity and forcefulness of a devoted father.

A. Paul appeals once again to what they saw of the integrity of him and his team in vs. 10: **You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;**

1. To behave *devoutly* means that they lived religiously—in conformity with God—as those who were serving God.
 - A father who does not go to church or read the word is not devout.
2. To behave *justly* means that they were fair and righteous in their dealings with other people.
 - They were conformed to the moral law—in their business dealings, for example, there was nothing that could be used against them...
 - A father who hides the defects in something is selling undermines his ministry to his children.
3. And that brings us to the next thing which summarises these two—that they behaved *blamelessly*—
 - People accused them and pointed many fingers at them, but there was no *fair* accusation that could be brought against them.
 - No one should be chosen to serve as a minister, an elder, or a deacon unless he is blameless...
 - but all of us ought to be blameless....
 - Our ministry to others is greatly hindered by a bad example...as Matthew Poole says, “the evil example of ministers often spoils the success of their ministry.”
 - Is it their pride? Is it their selfishness? gossip? lying? cheating? greed? whining? self-pity? unjust anger? sexual impurity? excess in eating or drinking? an ungodly family? lack of self-control?
 - All these things can spoil a ministry.

TRANS> A father who loves his children will live in integrity before them.

- His example matters and he knows it.

B. But besides this, he will use his fatherly authority to draw others to live for God.

1. Sometimes fathers and ministers don't realise how much influence they have.
 - Often it scares them to think about and they want to pretend that they don't.
 - But instead, you fathers ought to make the most of this influence to lead those under your care to live lives worthy of God, the way Paul does.
 - Verse 11-12: **you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, ¹² that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.**
 - Parents, officers in the church, what a grand thing it is to think that you influence others to live for God.
2. This *exhorting, comforting, and charging* is the sort of thing a father does when he encourages his son to finish a hard task that he has been given...to finish the race.
 - a. *Exhorting* refers to coming up to him to urge him to walk worthy of God who has called him, to do what he has been given to do—to stay at it and to not give way to the flesh.
 - It involves showing how important it is to do this—how good and right it is—how nothing else will do.
 - It is the Lord who has called us, and we dare not ignore Him who has done so much for us.
 - b. *Comforting* involves the encouragement to keep on going in hard times...
 - It has to do with reminding the one you minister to that God is with them, and that His grace will enable them to do the will of God...
 - That though they are not sufficient and have not the strength, God is at work in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure.
 - The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in them to enable them walk worthy of God who has called them.
 - c. And *charging* is the strongest of these terms—
 - This is where a father resorts to discipline to impress upon his son the importance of walking worthy of God...
 - Within the church, the Lord has given us rebukes and suspension from the Lord's Table and even expulsion from the church if necessary!
 - The message must be clear to all that if anyone refuses to walk worthy of the Lord—not if they simply come short as we all do, but if they refuse to—such will not be tolerated.
 - Within the home, there is also a rebuke and another family member can and should be brought before the church if necessary...
 - It is a ministry to them to reclaim them if possible...
 - And parents are given the rod of discipline and can withhold privileges to enforce the fact that deviation from God's calling will not be tolerated in their home.
 - But remember the nursing mother...

- This authority is never to be used without the love and tenderness of the nursing mother—true care for the one who is receiving it.

Conclusion: And really, this is true with all four of these characteristics of ministry.

- Effective ministry does not use one of these and then another, but all of them together—
 - with the goal to see those ministered to walking worthy of God who had called them into His kingdom and grace!
 - If you are the one ministering, you must bring God’s message boldly—fully and without alteration,
 - And you must bring it with an eye to pleasing God,
 - And you must bring it with nursing mother like care and affection,
 - And you must bring it with the integrity and authority of a faithful father who is earnest about seeing those you minister to walk worthy of God.
- That is the model for ministry that we are given here.
 - It is a great challenge for us!
 - But as I told you when we began, a model is of no use if it doesn’t give you something better than you are to aim for!
 - Each of you have ways that God has given for you to minister to others, and each of you have those who minister to you.
 - Pray that all this ministry would be effective to the glory of God who has called us into His own kingdom and glory.