

Bangalore Conference, 1 Thess Exposition

Study 2 – 1 Thess 2:1-16

Introduction

Yesterday, we talked about the way Paul encouraged this young church by making them look back at where they had come from, how God had worked among them when the gospel had been preached and about where they now stood.

Illust – I don't know much about politics, but I hear and see what is reported about politicians and the way they go about their business. I sometimes watch programmes where they debate issues. When two politicians disagree, there seem to be two ways of doing battle. One is like a full frontal attack. They talk about the other's policies and try to show why they are wrong. But there is another much more devious method. This is often how the media works. Rather than debating the idea, they find something in the man or woman's past that is an embarrassment and try to discredit them. They try to show that the person has no integrity, can't be trusted, whose motives are suspect, who has a hidden agenda. It has proven to be a very effective strategy at getting rid of someone and along with them, all their ideas.

As we come to ch 2 of 1 Thess today, we have to read between the lines a little (which can be risky!) to answer the question, "what is Paul saying and why?" Ch 2 is all about Paul defending his ministry in Thess. Why should he feel the need to do this? Because there was opposition to him and their tactic was to discredit his character and ministry. Someone said "*The credibility of the message depends on the credibility of the messengers.*". Paul had faced severe opposition when the church had been planted and continued to face opposition as he travelled. But he was not in Thess anymore. They couldn't give him the full frontal treatment (arrest, imprisonment, stoning etc.), so the tactics change. It seems likely that his enemies had tried to discredit Paul and his companions and to question their motives, their agenda, their behaviour. The reason they attacked the messenger was to attack the message. The truth of the gospel was at stake. Why did his enemies hate it so much? Because it was a gospel that condemned them as unbelievers, that threw open the door to Gentiles of all people, that offered grace to sinners.

So Paul defends himself, not so much to protect his own reputation, but because he knows that an attack on him might well harm the cause of the gospel in Thess. As Paul defends his ministry there, I want us again to focus on the application to ourselves. What is the HS saying to us through this chapter of God's word?

He tells us some important characteristics of his own ministry which are a great example. This applies especially to ministers like you, but it doesn't end there. You are not the only minister in your church. God describes his church as a priesthood. No longer do you come to a priest to perform acts of worship on your behalf. Now you have a Great High Priest who gives you access to God and who has made his people, Christians, to be priests.

1 Pe 2:9 "*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*"

That verse tells us that Christians are kings, priests and prophets before God. Therefore you ALL have a ministry, all minister in some way. Not saying it is all the same but what Paul says here applies to leaders and every member of Christ's church. With all that in mind, I want to show you the character of Paul and co's ministry and point out 4 aspects of it that should be present in your ministry also.

Genuine ministry

You must exercise a GENUINE MINISTRY. There have clearly been things said against Paul, Silas and Timothy that need countering or else not just themselves but their message will be discredited. So he points out a few reasons why their ministry was genuine, real. For one thing, it had been **tested**. Read again Acts 16 and 17 and you will see that Paul faced opposition from the Jews wherever he went. And it was serious opposition, arrests, beatings, imprisonment and there was worse to come. If they had been out for their own gain it is unlikely they would have continued in the face of such treatment. Their genuine character had been tested and the fact that they had continued to preach the gospel in spite of opposition was a powerful testimony to their genuine desire to preach the gospel for the good of the Thess. They could also speak about being approved by God, entrusted with the gospel by him, and always aware they ministered in the sight of God who tests hearts and who is witness to all.

Illust – everyone slows down for a speed camera, no matter how they drive the rest of the time. Everyone does 70 on the motorway when they drive next to a police car. Everyone works hard when their boss is looking over their shoulder. To acknowledge the presence of the one to whom you answer makes all the difference. Paul was conscious of God's presence all the time and his conscience was clear.

It was obvious they were not looking to flatter people and gain a following by any means. Rather, their ministry was genuinely of God and for his sake.

APP: Your ministry should be genuine. It should be tested, pushed if you like to see if it can stand up to scrutiny. I always use the example of some of the old cars I have owned to illustrate this – on an old car, you can't tell what good metal is and what is rusty and weak UNTIL you apply some pressure (screwdrivers work quite well!). A genuine ministry of God will be tested and will stand up under it. There will be no playing to the crowd, no mask, no flattery. A genuine ministry can invite the scrutiny of God, in fact it is consciously in God's sight. Paul wrote elsewhere:

2 Co 4:1-2 "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

Motives are so important. It matters WHY you do things as well as HOW. And God sees those hidden motives that no-one else can. Is your ministry genuine? Could you call God as your witness without any shame? You have a ministry to God in worship, to the church in fellowship and nurturing others, and to the world in evangelism. So be genuine.

Gentle ministry

As Paul defends the ministry he and his companions had in Thess, he appeals several times to the way they lived among them and says "you know" or "you remember" or "you are witnesses". There is something challenging in that for us as we read this today. That we might defend what we do and how we do it, but we also should be able to say "you saw it in us". This is especially true in second point – **a gentle ministry**. Paul held a special position in that he was an apostle. Some would argue that apostles have continued beyond the early days of the church, but I am persuaded that they were a unique bunch with a unique ministry. They were all men who had been with Jesus, who had met the Lord, who could speak first hand of what they had seen and heard. So the eleven (Judas was removed) and then Paul himself made up a unique bunch. And they were entrusted with a unique foundational responsibility for God's church. And so in v6, Paul says he had every right to expect certain things from the church, but it was characteristic of his ministry that it was gentle.

Look at the picture he uses, like a mother caring for her little children. The whole relationship is one of deep love, sharing love, giving love. It wasn't just a job, but it was a labour of love and they gave themselves to it. It wasn't just words, but he can appeal to their memory. V9 "Surely you remember..." Paul and the others didn't exercise their rights, but went out of their way not to be a burden to these Christians. Why did they do this? This was none other than the teaching of the Lord Jesus himself:

Mt 20:25-28 "Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.""

APP: Do I need to say anymore on this point? Our ministry to each other, to the world is to be LIKE JESUS!. There are times when authority needs to be exerted, when strong things might need to be said, but mothers sometimes have to do that! Gentle ministry means one that is covered by love, one where love permeates every part and is not absent even when tough things need to be said and done. These words are often read out at sentimental times (weddings etc.) but they are God's design for his people's lives.

1 Co 13:4-7 "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

Is your ministry a gentle ministry? Have you forgotten that this is the kind of ministry the Lord exercised? You remember what Matt recorded of Jesus? He quotes from Isaiah and says that the way Jesus dealt with people was to fulfil these words:

Mt 12:18-21 "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no-one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.""

How easy to just snap the bruised reed, how easy just to snuff out the smouldering wick! Demanding your rights may trample on others to satisfy yourself, but a gentle minister even goes without sleep (v9) to enable the gospel to be preached to those who so need it.

Are you challenged by God's word here? It really is like having an x-ray of Paul so that we see how he thinks. The challenge here is on that you can never rise to in your own strength. How easily do you find that desire to exercise your rights rather than give ourselves to others in love? But praise God that God's people have the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence to sanctify every part of their lives. So keep in step with the Spirit, being gentle with one another, sharing your lives with each other to be a blessing.

Blameless ministry

Paul is not done defending his ministry yet and he wants to make it clear that not only in his gospel preaching but also in his pastoral care of the Thess church, he can defend his ministry in the sight of God. In v10, he again calls them to the court room to testify how they lived and also appeals to God again and he describes his ministry with three words. My third point is the last of those three – blameless ministry. The ministry he exercised was holy, righteous and blameless. Is he blowing his own trumpet here? Is he arrogantly exalting himself? No, but he is eager to defend their ministry in Thess for the sake of the gospel.

Holy probably has the sense of being constantly centred on God and devoted to him. Righteous means that is was free from injustice towards men, we might say upright. Blameless doesn't mean sinlessly perfect but it means being above accusation, beyond reproach. If anyone had wanted to bring charges against these men for their behaviour, they would have found nothing.

Paul uses another family metaphor here, that of father – encouraging, comforting, urging. There is a three point sermon just there! What is the goal? That God's people might live lives worthy of God who calls you. Paul ministered blamelessly that God's people might live worthily.

APP: Take the challenge of this point seriously. Are you living in a way consistent with the truths you are teaching?

Illust – my daughter goes to a gym class. Interesting to look at the coaches who teach them. Some are young, fit, strong. But there is one coach who is quite overweight and has to go outside regularly to have a cigarette. It is hard to take her seriously because her job and her lifestyle seem to clash. Or take another example – 3 years ago, a senior police officer in charge of policing the roads was caught going past a speed camera at 90mph in a 60mph area. Someone called it breathtaking hypocrisy. Does the way you minister undermine the message you preach? Is there a clash that like an earthquake will shake the foundation of what you are saying? Your ministry to each other as God's people AND as ministers and pastors is to be like this! Motherly and fatherly, holy, righteous, blameless, encouraging, comforting, urging each other on to live worthy lives, lives that glorify God.

This again might sound an impossible ideal. Without the gracious influence of God's Holy Spirit it certainly would be. But the message we preach is the gospel of the grace of the Lord Jesus and that grace does not begin and end at the cross. It is grace for each day. The HS indwells us to give us the grace and the strength to exercise a blameless ministry.

Effective ministry

I want to finish this morning by saying that Paul's ministry (and therefore ours also) was not just genuine, gentle and blameless, but it was also effective. There is a reminder in these verses of the unique ministry the apostles had (their word being word of God) as we said earlier. But we also see here God's blessing on this ministry in that it was effective, it produced results. The people heard the word of God and they received it as the word of God. This word was at work in those who believed so that they began to live lives worthy of the name of Christ despite being opposed just as Paul was opposed, just as others had been, even the church in Judea, even the Lord himself.

A ministry like the one we have described will be an effective ministry. For some, the effect might be to embrace the truth and believe on Christ. For others, it might be fierce opposition, hostile. But either way it will be effective. Christ's ministry was like that.

If our ministry within the church to each other and outside the church to the world is not genuine, the world will see. If it is harsh and unloving, the world will see. If our lives are not blameless, the world will see. No surprise then that often our ministry is ineffective. So we take the challenge of God's word seriously. Here is the standard for the ministry of pastors and leaders. Here also is the standard for our ministry to each other as church members – genuine (motives right), gentle (sharing our lives with each other), blameless (holy and righteous). And we pray that God would use us to great effect. Pray that God's word would not only be heard from us, but also believed on. Pray that opposition will not discourage us but rather confirm our unity with other believers who suffer in the same way and with our Saviour who suffered for us. Pray that we might not put any obstacles in the way of anyone from being saved from God's wrath. Pray that God would have the glory in his church, Amen.