

1 Thessalonians

Chapter 2

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. ² We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. ³ For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴ On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵ You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. ⁶ We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, ⁷ but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. ⁸ We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. ⁹ Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹ For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. ¹³ And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. ¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men ¹⁶ in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

2:1–12 A “manual” for a minister: 1. His message is God's good news (“gospel,” v. 2). 2. His motive is not impurity (v. 3), pleasing people (v. 4), greed (v. 5) or seeking praise from people (v. 6), but pleasing God (v. 4). 3. His manner is not one of trickery (v. 3), flattery (v. 5) or a cover-up (v. 5), but of courage (v. 2), gentleness (v. 7), love (vv. 8, 11), toil (v. 9) and holiness (v. 10). (CSB)

2:1 *You know.* The local church could refute the accusation of insincerity that evidently had been leveled against Paul (v. 3). (CSB)

Paul visited the Thessalonians during his second missionary journey. (TLSB)

2:2 *insulted*. Paul was deeply hurt by the way he had been treated in the city of Philippi (see Ac 16:19–40). (CSB)

Paul and Silas narrowly escaped the search made for them in Thessalonica. Instead, their host and some of the Christian brothers were mistreated. (TLSB)

To drive this thought home, Paul now goes into historical details: But having before suffered and been insulted, as you know, in Philippi, we took bold confidence in our God to speak to you the Gospel of God with intense earnestness. These words of Paul substantiate the account of Luke in Acts 16. Paul and Silas, although Roman citizens, had been grossly ill-treated by the rulers at Philippi, the so-called praetors, being both scourged and thrown into prison in opposition to Roman law. Of this insulting treatment the Thessalonians knew, the wounds of Paul and Silas having probably not yet been healed when they reached their city. In spite of this outrage, however, Paul had pushed forward, according to the command of the Lord, Matt. 10, 23, bringing the Gospel to other cities and to Thessalonica first of all. In doing so, Paul had made use of all boldness and courage in proclaiming the Gospel, relying, as he did, upon the power of God, not upon his own natural talents and fearlessness. With the most intense earnestness and zeal had he labored among them, even at the peril of his life. This is the spirit which should at all times actuate the ministers of the Gospel, making them willing to do all and bear all for the sake of the Master and His precious news of salvation. (Kretzmann)

2:3 *trick*. The Greek for this word was originally used of a lure for catching fish; it came to be used of any sort of cunning used for profit. (CSB)

There were many false teachers of religion and philosophy in the Greek world of the time who deceived people and made great claims for personal gains. Paul distances himself from such deceivers. (TLSB)

2:4 APPROVED BY GOD – This was the result after a test. God tested Paul and then entrusted the preaching of the Gospel to him. (TLSB)

our hearts. Not simply our emotions, but also our intellects and wills. (CSB)

Paul preached in constant awareness of his accountability before God for his works. (TLSB)

The situation was this: As God, who tests the hearts, had attested his fitness to be entrusted with the Gospel, so he was speaking the news of salvation, so he was preaching sin and grace, with no thought of pleasing men. It was God, who knows the hearts of men, that had chosen the apostle for his office. Paul did not assume any worthiness of his own, but he exalted the authority of God. Cp. 1 Tim. 1, 12. By reason of this commission he considered himself under obligations not to engage men's minds by flattering proposals nor to adapt his preaching to their tastes, but to consult only the

pleasure of God, who, as the Judge of hearts, would soon expose and judge impure motives and selfish objects. (Kretzmann)

2:5 *mask*. Personal profit was never Paul's aim. (CSB)

Paul's opponents conducted themselves for flattery and praise. Paul, however, as the Lord's true servant, wanted to please God, who searches the heart (unlike people, who see only what is outside). (TLSB)

2:6 *burden*. Apostles were entitled to be supported by the church (see 1Co 9:3–14; 2Co 11:7–11). Paul did not always take advantage of the right, but insisted that he had it. (CSB)

Though Paul and his fellow workers could request pay, thanks, and greater public recognition, they did not seek these but focused on the service to which God called them. (TLSB)

That there was no selfish ambition in his heart appeared finally from the fact that he did not seek praise and honor from men, as he pointedly says, neither from the Thessalonians nor from anybody else. This disinterestedness stands out all the more strongly, since Paul might well have been burdensome to the Thessalonians, he might have used his authority, he might have assumed the dignity which was his as the apostle of Christ, and demanded honoring recognition of his position, and that of Silas, from them. Note: All persons that hold positions of authority in the Church will do well to pattern after St. Paul in this respect, since it is only in exceptional cases that the dignity of their office receives the recognition which it deserves in the estimation of men. (Kretzmann)

2:7 MOTHER CARING – ESV has “nursing mother.” Paul characterizes the care he has rendered to the Thessalonians with a most intimate, human example. (TLSB)

The apostle is still carrying out the thought of v.1. that his coming to Thessalonica had not been in vain, that his ministry in that city had been in accordance with the will of God, with an entire absence of selfishness: But we were lenient in the midst of you, as when a nursing mother fondles her own children. Lenience, gentleness, kindness, that had been the key-note of Paul's behavior in his apostolic work at all times. All was tenderness and devotion, fostering and protecting care, in his relation to the Thessalonian Christians. He knows of no better and more striking comparison than that of a mother in her tender care for the children of her bosom. Also, Paul was not the strict disciplinarian and stern taskmaster, but he was mild, kind, loving in the midst of them; he was among them, surrounded by them, as a mother by her children, as a teacher by his pupils. (Kretzmann)

2:8 OUR LIVES – Cf John 15:13. Paul was willing to risk his life to preach the Gospel in hostile environments. (TLSB)

2:9 *toil and hardship.* Greeks despised manual labor and viewed it as fit only for slaves, but Paul was not ashamed of doing any sort of work that would help further the gospel. He did not want to be unduly dependent on others. (CSB)

Paul did not wait for the support of others but did receive offerings when given. (TLSB)

2:10 **RIGHTEOUS AND BLAMESLESS...AMONG YOU** – Paul was not claiming perfection in himself, but that he was made righteous and blameless in Christ, who enabled him to set a good example. (TLSB)

2:11 **FATHER...OWN CHILDREN** – See maternal example in verse 7. Here Paul uses a paternal example to describe his warnings and instruction. (TLSB)

2:12 *live lives worthy of God.* See Eph 4:1. (CSB)

This comes from the Greek word *peripateo* and is used in the ethical sense to mean “conduct yourself.” The Thessalonians are admonished to demonstrate a character compatible with God’s will, i.e., the revealed Word of God. (TLSB)

calls.† See **note** on Eph 1:4 – (Divine election is a constant theme in Paul’s letters (Ro 8:29–33; 9:6–26; 11:5, 7, 28; 16:13; Col 3:12; 1Th 1:4; 2Th 2:13; Tit 1:1). In this chapter it is emphasized in the following ways: (1) “he chose us” (here); (2) “he predestined us” (v. 5); (3) “we were also chosen” (v. 11); (4) “having been predestined” (v. 11). (CSB)

kingdom. The chief subject of Jesus’ teaching. Paul did not use this term often, but used it once to sum up the message of his preaching (Ac 20:25). (CSB)

Manifestation of the age to come. It will come in its fullness when all people of God will be resurrected and Christ will hand over the kingdom to God (1 Cor 15:23-28). Cf Rm. 8:18. God’s kingdom, however, is not limited to the future (Rm 14:17). (TLSB)

2:13 *not as the word of men.* Not tailored to fit the popular knowledge of the day. (CSB)

The Gospel Paul preaches is not his own creation. He received it from the Lord to pass on to faithful persons who are able to preserve and teach it (1 Cor 15:3; Gal 1:11; 2 Tim 2:2). (TLSB)

AT WORK IN YOU – The Greek word is *energetai* which could also be translated “working effectively.” The Lord’s Word will produce visible fruit among those who listen and believe (Is 55:10-11). Such life-changing effect cannot be produced by mere human words. (TLSB)

WHO BELIEVE – The acceptance of the Gospel as the Word of God, as the divine message for man’s salvation, is essential for faith; it is this confidence which must precede and accompany the certainty of salvation. (Kretzmann)

2:14 *imitators*. Gk *mimetai*, source of Eng “mimic.” The Thessalonians had passed through an experience of persecution like the churches of Judea (2Tm 3:12). (TLSB)

Judea. Refers to the original churches in Jerusalem. The believers were dispersed after the martyrdom of St Stephen and subsequent persecution (Ac 8:1). However, there is no mention of martyrdom at Thessalonica (Ac 17:1–9). (TLSB)

You suffered from your own countrymen. At the time of Paul’s initial visit to Thessalonica, persecution instigated by the Jews apparently was carried out by Gentiles (see Ac 17:5–9). (CSB)

Jews. Although Paul had great love and deep concern for the salvation of those of his own race (see Ro 9:1–3; 10:1), he did not fail to rebuke harshly Jews who persecuted the church. (CSB)

2:15 *prophets*. Throughout OT history, Israelites had persecuted their prophets (cf. Ac 7:52). (CSB)

2:16 KEEP US... GENTLES – They had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, for they hindered the apostle from bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles, lest the latter should have an advantage over them in being heirs to the salvation which they rejected. By this entire list of hostile acts, moreover, they were heading toward a terrible result and end: they were filling up the measure of their sins to the very top: with every new transgression they were approaching nearer to the limit of God’s forbearance. (Kretzmann)

measure of their sins. Exhausting God’s long-suffering patience. (TLSB)

wrath of God has come. The eschatological wrath, the final outpouring of God’s anger upon sinful mankind (see 1:10). It is spoken of as already present, either because it had been partially experienced by the Jews or because of its absolute certainty. (CSB)

Some scholars have tried to connect this “wrath” with certain historical events that were about to happen, such as the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70). The verb’s past tense stresses certainty of wrath in the future. Therefore, it can be considered as complete. Besides the sure and future judgment, everyone who is not in Christ and opposes His Gospel of grace is under God’s wrath (Jn 3:18). (TLSB)

And so the wrath of God must now discharge itself; the Jews are ripe for the judgment of God, it was even then imminent, and His wrath was poured out upon them at the destruction of Jerusalem. Cp. Matt. 23, 37-39; 24, 16 ff.; Dan. 9, 24 ff. Note: The fate of

the Jews is a warning example for all times, bidding all men to refrain from all enmity to the Word of God. (Kretzmann)

2:1–16 Paul’s experience, inner being, motives, and love toward the Christians is laid bare. He speaks about how he conducted himself (vv 9–12). He commends the Thessalonians for receiving the Gospel preached by him as the Word of God and for enduring persecution for its sake (vv 13–16). The Lord wants us to share His Gospel boldly, even if there is suffering or conflict in our path. We should please God and be faithful to His message rather than speak what is pleasing for people to hear. Let us not make lack of financial resources an excuse. The Lord who commanded His disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations will be with us according to His promise and will enable us to pass through any hardship we may face. The Gospel’s truth and power will not change despite our feebleness (2Co 4:7). • Help us, Lord, to confess the Gospel of Christ faithfully. May our life also shine before the world so that the preaching of the Gospel may not be eclipsed by the darkness in our life. Amen. (TLSB)

Paul’s Longing to See the Thessalonians

17 But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. **18** For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us. **19** For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? **20** Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

2:17 *torn away.* Lit. “orphaned.” Paul is like a mother (v. 7), a father (v. 11) and now an orphan. (CSB)

Paul’s separation from the Thessalonians and the resultant deprivation. The past tense may point to a sudden separation due to persecution (Ac 17:10). (TLSB)

for a short time. Paul returned to Greece (Ac 20:2). (TLSB)

2:18 **COME TO YOU** – Satan uses human agents to bring obstacles before God’s people. This may refer to the governing authorities of Thessalonica who sought to imprison Paul and Silas so they would not preach the Word. However, the ultimate authority belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ and not to Satan (Mt 28:18). (TLSB)

2:19 *crown.* Not a royal crown, but a wreath used on festive occasions or as the prize in the Greek games. (CSB)

Just as an athlete rejoices and boasts in a prize, so Paul will rejoice when he sees the Thessalonians before the Lord. (TLSB)

when he comes. The expression was used regarding the arrival of a great person, as on a royal visit. (CSB)

2:20 *you are our glory and joy.* True both now (cf. Php 4:1) and when Christ returns. (CSB)

Gk *doxa*, refers here to someone in whom one can take pride (see imagery in 2:7, 11). (TLSB)