

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Second Coming Letters of Paul – Part 4

First Thessalonians

I. Exposition of Chapter Two.

A. **Verse 1** - **“For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.”** – This begins a section where Paul is defending himself and his ministry. As was the case in many places, there were unbelievers who were attempting to undermine Paul’s ministry by making accusations to discredit him.

1. **“...our coming to you was not in vain.”** – The word **“vain”** means; **“pertaining to being lacking in results—‘without result, without effect’**¹ The Amplified Bible: **“...was not useless and fruitless.”**

“What travelers were saying (1:9) about Paul’s effective presentation of the gospel, the Thessalonians themselves knew to be true. His ministry was not ‘in vain’ (empty). His preaching was neither foolish, worthless, nor ineffective. More important, the manner of his preaching and the nature of his ministry were not empty in the sense of being hollow, unreal, false, or pretentious.”²

B. **Verse 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.”** – Paul is referring to the events recorded in **Acts 16:19-24** where they were placed in prison at Philippi. The suffering included a flogging and having their feet in stocks while confined in an inner prison. When Paul arrived in Thessalonica, the wounds on his back from Philippi were still fresh. If Paul was in it for himself, he wouldn’t have kept going onto Thessalonica. Paul states that they were **“...bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God...”**, in spite of the persecution he and Silas encountered in Philippi. The word **“bold”** means; **“to have courage or boldness in the face of danger or opposition”**³ Note, that this boldness came from God who provides it for the believer in a supernatural way. This boldness comes through prayer and through being filled with the Holy Spirit (**Acts 4:24-31**).

C. **Verse 3** – **“For our exhortation *did not come* from error or uncleanness, nor *was it* in deceit.”** – First, the word **“exhortation”** means; **“to ask, summons, exhort, comfort, or encourage.”**⁴ Here, Paul begins to defend himself from what must have been some of the accusations from his opposition.

1. **“...did not come from error...”** – So, this implies that Paul was being accused of being in **“error.”** This word means; **“the content of that which misleads or deceives—‘misleading belief, deceptive belief, error, mistaken view’**⁵ William Mounce adds: **“Literally, the word denotes something that has wandered from its path”**⁶ This, of course, could have come from both Jews and pagans. Paul is saying emphatically that he did not mislead, deceive or wander off the path with his message.

2. **“uncleanness”** - **“any substance which is filthy or dirty”**⁷ Dr. Bob Utley writes:

“This term implies a sexual looseness (cf. 4:7; Rom. 1:24; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5). It must be remembered that pagan worship often employed sexual acts. Paul may have been accused of advocating moral looseness by Jewish legalists who misunderstood justification by faith.”⁸

3. **“deceit”** – **“using trickery and falsehood”**⁹ Warren Wiersbe writes:

“The word translated ‘guile’ carries the idea of ‘baiting a hook.’ In other words, Paul did not trap people into being saved, the way a clever salesman traps people into buying his product. Spiritual witnessing and ‘Christian salesmanship’ are different. Salvation does not lie at the end of a clever argument or a subtle presentation. It is the result of God’s Word and the power of the Holy Spirit”¹⁰

¹Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 783.

²*The Complete Biblical Library: Acts – Revelation, Volume 2*, (Empowered Life, Tulsa, OK, 2016.), 840.

³Louw and Nida, 306.

⁴*Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, William D. Mounce, Gen. ed. (Zondervan Publishers, Grand Rapids, 2006.), 227.

⁵Louw and Nida, 366.

⁶*Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 217.

⁷Louw and Nida, 698.

⁸Robert James Utley, *Paul’s First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians*, vol. Volume 11, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 1997), 87.

⁹Louw and Nida, 758.

¹⁰Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 164.

D. Verse 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.” – Paul is saying that their hearts had been tested and approved by God and that’s all that matters.

“Obviously, I’m not trying to be a people pleaser! No, I am trying to please God. If I were still trying to please people, I would not be Christ’s servant.” - Galatians 1:10 – New Living Translation

E. Verses 5-6 – “For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness— God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.”

1. The idea of “flattering words” goes back to the idea of not pleasing men. These words mean; “praise as a means of gratifying someone’s vanity”¹¹ Flattery comes from ulterior motives. It misleads people by making them think you believe in them more than you do.

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”

Romans 16:17-18.

2. “...cloak for covetousness...” – “covetousness” means; “a greedy desire to have more”¹². This doesn’t have to be referring to money or material possessions. It can include a greedy desire for power, position, influence and more. Leon Morris writes:

“He further denies putting on a mask to cover up greed. The preachers did not hide their real motives in order to secure personal profit. Some translations concentrate on the money angle...but the word *pleonexia* denotes the general attitude of eager seeking to have more. While it is often shown in the desire for money, it is the spirit of desire in its most general sense, self-aggrandisement. In disavowing any such motive Paul solemnly calls God to witness (cf. v. 10; Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Phil. 1:8).”¹³

3. Concerning Paul’s words; “Nor did we seek glory from men...” – This too, goes back to being a man-pleaser versus a God-pleaser. This was the case of many of the rulers of the synagogue in Jesus’ day. John writes:

“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” John 12:42-43

F. Verses 7-8 – “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. 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.”

1. “...we were gentle among you...” – ; William Mounce states regarding gentleness; “Gentleness means to approach others (including one’s enemies) in a humble and caring spirit. not using force to get one’s way.”¹⁴ Kindness is also implied with this word.
2. “...as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” – This reveals a real tenderness and nurturing on Paul’s part. “Cherishes” has the idea of caring for in all aspects. This includes nourishing and comforting.
3. They not only imparted the “gospel of God” but also their very “...own lives...”.

“They not only gave the message of eternal life, the gospel of God, but also imparted their own innermost beings (lit., ‘our own souls’) as well. They gave whatever they had in order to help the beloved Thessalonians. The love of Paul and his companions is evident, for genuine love finds expression in giving to people—not only to their spiritual needs, which are primary, but also to their physical needs.”¹⁵

¹¹Louw and Nida, 430.

¹²Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House., 1977)

¹³Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Volume 13: 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984.)

¹⁴Mounce’s *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, William D. Mounce, Gen. ed. (Zondervan Publishers, Grand Rapids, 2006.), 281.

¹⁵Thomas L. Constable, “1 Thessalonians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 694–695.