

### 1 Thessalonians 2:1–8 (ESV)

**1** For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. **2** 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. **3** For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, **4** 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. **5** For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. **6** Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. **7** But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. **8** 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.

Paul defends his ministry

Have you ever done very serious ministry to someone, ministry that was very costly personally to you. And you knew that you were doing it with very good motives. But people find a way to tear your ministry apart. They accuse you of bad motives. They accuse you of ineffective methods. Basically, they try to rip your ministry to shreds.

How should we handle that?

Well that is what Paul is facing this morning in our text.

The situation is that Paul has reached Corinth after a stint of persecution first at Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea, and then ineffectiveness possibly at Athens. Then he was alone at Corinth and was waiting for his team to get back to him before Paul started to minister again. The news about Thessalonica reached him at a point that he seemed to be having second thoughts about his ministry. But then he found out that the Thessalonians were doing **way** better than he expected. So he is **thrilled** about that.

At the same time he must have heard about all of the criticisms of Paul's ministry, his message, and his person. Now, given the evidence of the whole letter to the Thessalonians and the loyalty the church people had toward Paul, this attack must have been largely from outside the church. The attacks were probably from the Judiazers who followed Paul from Philippi to Thessalonica.

It is often much better when the attacks come from **outside** the church than when they come from **inside** the church.

We can back our way into the accusations being railed against Paul by the defense he gives for his ministry in our text. We can assume he did not pick these topics out of a hat. It was more likely that Timothy made some notes from his visit with the Thessalonians, and Paul is reading those notes and responding point by point.

Now we might think, well this is not very godly. Christ was **silent** before His accusers. Shouldn't **we** be silent as well?

Well, it depends.

We have no need to fight evil with evil. So if people are just saying things about us because we are Christians, we can turn the other cheek. We should not allow our **pride** to drive our **defense**. We need to consider other factors. Like **who** is being harmed by this attack on me? Or what harm will happen if onlookers **believe** the accusations? This text is not about Paul trying to make himself **look good**. He was trying to affirm **the truth** that the Thessalonians probably already believed about Paul. He is affirming his ministry to them so they will not let **doubt** or **distrust** distract them.

Sometimes we need to respond to the **accusations** of our **enemies** for the **sake** of our **friends**, for the sake of those who depend upon us and trust us. I think that is the case here.

**1 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.**

Paul had just gotten done telling the Thessalonians how pleased he was for how they were following Christ. They had believed the Gospel that Paul preached and it made a **huge** difference, a **core** difference in their lives. It changed the **object of their worship**. That is what true faith in Christ does.

So now Paul moves on to **his defense** against his accusers.

Their accusations would have been something like this.

This Paul guy is a jail bird. He already did time in Philippi. You don't see that happening to good people. No. Maybe he is as dumb as a hoe handle. He sure does not handle the Old Testament like all the experts do. Or maybe it isn't that he is **making a mistake**. It is probably true that this Paul fellow has an **angle**. There is something **in it for him** that he is hiding.

He probably wants to hit on the women. Or maybe his angle is money. If not those two, for sure it is power. Because money, sex or power drive everything in men like him.

For sure he isn't speaking for God. If he were, he would be telling you to become Jewish to get right with God. I can assure you the Jerusalem high priest did not authorize this man. No, he is a fly by night self appointed charlatan.

He is just trying to **use you**. He wants to **take advantage of you**. He will tell you what you want to hear so he can get something **from you**. You just watch. When he is done **taking** from you, he will hit the road with **what he wants**. Aren't you even a little suspicious that he left town so soon? C'mon now. This man is not to be trusted.

He is the kind of guy who comes into town, doesn't do an honest day's work, and leaves with your money.

This must have been the kind of things Paul's enemies were saying. Because the defense Paul gave covered these kinds of issues.

When our ministries get criticized, we must remember that **better** ministries were criticized in **worse** ways. The criticism doesn't **prove anything**, one way or the other. The thing we need to make sure is that any **valid criticisms** are untrue. After that we need to choose the next faithful thing to do.

Paul appeals to the Thessalonians, first off, to **remember what they know**. We do well to begin our thinking with what **we know to be true**. We might be wrong. But often we have seen enough to figure some things out before people have a chance to trick us. Start by thinking about **what you know** about the person in question.

For instance, if you heard a rumor that Mark, when he was younger, made a whole bunch of money ripping people off on Wall Street, we would all know to start with **what we know** of Mark. While Mark is smart enough to do such a thing, we all know that this is not the kind of crime Mark would do, or even be tempted to do. We know Mark. And we start there.

Paul says you know that **our coming to you was not in vain**. That could mean that we did not come to you with **vanity** as **our motive**. Or it could mean that our coming to you didn't serve **no good purpose**. It could go either way. I think Paul just got done telling them how well they are doing, so it was probably the later. Paul's accusers might say that he is completely ineffective. He probably was only there for 3 weeks. But Paul says, no. A lot of very important things happened in the short time I was there.

Does the accuser of your soul ever tell you that **all your ministry is in vain**? That **nothing is happening**? Don't believe him. If you are presenting God's word in day to day conversations, if you are submitting your will to His will daily, God is doing something. Just because we cannot always see it does not mean that God's word is returning void. According to His word, it cannot. So Paul argues that his ministry was effective.

**2 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.**

Next Paul says that we suffered **before we got to you**. We suffered **when** we got to you. We **continually** face conflict. We always have a force against us we need to contend with.

And how did we act in the face of all that?

We boldly declared the gospel to you.

What an example to follow here. Paul is conveying that his team would not have done the things they were doing if their **motive** was to **take advantage** of the Thessalonians. Who chooses to suffer this way? And far from earning them **money or power**, what they earned was **abuse** because of the message they were conveying. If they were staying in luxury hotels and feasting on caviar, one might be able to accuse them of evil motives. But Paul's team was getting **beat up** and **slandered** for their trouble. Clearly the gospel of God was more important to Paul and his team than their very lives. Someone might still think Paul's **message** was false. But you could not accuse them of having any other **motive** than the one they said they had.

When you are bold to speak a message for which you will only suffer, you prove your sincerity. You prove that you **believe** that message.

**3 For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,**

The word **appeal** here has the same root word as paraclete- this idea of coming alongside to help. This is what the Holy Spirit does. He comes along side.

So Paul is not saying- we are so appealing and that attractiveness does not spring out of these things. No. It is an appeal, a persuasive message to get people to make a change. It is like when you disagree with a verdict that a court hands down and you make **an appeal**, a reasoned, impassioned argument.

Paul is saying that his gospel presentation doesn't spring from any of these three things.

The first refers to the **inaccuracy** of the message.

The second refers to **sexual motives** of the speaker.

The third refers to the **method of presentation** of the message.

We start with error. Remember that Paul is talking to Gentiles. The Jews in the town might easily think that Paul was out of his mind. What Paul was saying would have been out in left field for them. It should not have been. They should have been reading their Bibles instead of attending lectures. The establishment had it wrong. They misunderstood the purpose of the Messiah. So Paul was not in error, even though that was the most common accusation railed against him.

Paul also had no sexual motives. We **know that** because, first he says so, and second he lives a life where nothing like that surfaced. This was just **projection** by the religious crowd. **They** probably had impure motives that they worked hard to keep at bay, so that is what they would naturally assume about Paul, even without evidence.

Keep in mind, these same kinds of things can happen to any one of us. Our enemies rarely fight fair. They are not limited by the truth. A lie is as good as the truth to them if it gets the job done. That is how their father, the devil handles things.

Paul also had no motives to use deception in his message, to get them to believe say, that God's desire is that **all Christians** should be rich so he can trick you into making **him** rich. No. All Paul got for **his message** was multiple bruises. He had no fleshly motives for preaching a message for which he gained nothing personally by, at least nothing fleshly.

**4 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.**

Paul argues here about the source of his authority to preach. The Jews may be saying that no one in **their clan** ever gave Paul the authority to speak for God. Here Paul says, **woah**. You guys have humans to approve you. You could say **I went over their heads** in the chain of command. **God** is the one who approved my ministry and entrusted me with a specific message to a specific group of people. But don't worry. My audience really aren't people you would have wanted anyway, at least not on equal terms.

So Paul is saying his authority is higher than theirs. And just as he was given this authority by God, it is God who he has **to please**. He does not need to please the religious big shots and power houses. It is no concern of his if they **do not like the message** that God has given him to preach.

Jesus dealt with the same issues when the religious leaders kept pressing Christ about what power structures assigned him the permission to preach.

**[Mat 21:23, 42-43 ESV] 23 And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" ...**

Jesus did not answer them, but asked them a question. Who gave John the Baptist authority? They were too political to answer the questions. Then Jesus told a couple of parables and then He said this:

**42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? 43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.**

Basically the religious leaders think of themselves the builders. But they are not going by the plan of the owner. The builders assign rocks to spaces in the building. The religious leaders assign authority to people in their religion. And they are not going by the Master's plans.

These Jews should have reasoned with Paul and scoured their Old Testament for the truth. They didn't. They didn't feel they had to. They did not need to please their Father. They just had to please the big shots and hold the party line.

**so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.**

Well, Paul let them know that it is not the religious leaders who test our hearts. It is not **them** to whom we give our final account. And this judgment is not the kind of external tests that legalists love. No. This will be a **heart** judgment. So even the stuff we **never do** but we **want** to do will be found out. All our secret envies and lusts and worries, **everything** will be seen by **this** judge. So the message to his accusers is that you may want to rethink your plan. It is flawed.

You will not be judged by only **what you do**. You will be judged by **why you do**, in your heart of hearts, what you do. And if you hope to escape judgment, you better think twice religious leaders.

Paul's heart of heart goal, his motive, what he was shooting for, is **clear**. To please the God who knows everything. That is where **our** goals should be also. It does not matter what the rest of the church knows about you. What matters is **what God knows about you**. Live to please **Him**. And confess and repent of your failures when they come to your mind. That is the Christian life. We are continually applying the good news of the gospel to the intermittent news of our lives. And we find that when we are faithful, our Lord truly is pleased.

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

Paul is telling the truth from his heart of hearts here. It does not matter what he is being accused of. It is not true. Paul knows his motives.

Do you have any memories of discussions you had with your spouse early in your marriage. He or she would do something. And you got all worked up about it. Because you assumed that **they** did the thing for the same motive **you** would have done the thing. And then you find out that their motives were completely different than what you assumed? They weren't thinking anything like what you suspected them of.

We are often like that. We can never know another person's motives like **they** can know them. So it is important that we really know our own motives for things that we do. I suspect that more lying is done between believers about what our motives really are than anything else. That is just a guess though.

Because it is a lie we can **always** get away with. It is a lie that can get us **instantly** out of trouble. And when we present a **theory** about why we did something instead of a **reason** for why we did it, now we have deceived two people. First ourselves, and then our brother or sister.

Paul **knew** his motives. He was **certain** of them.

His motive was **not** to **flatter anyone** so that he could get them to do what he wanted them to do. Although this may not have taken a lot of introspection. The true Christian gospel is about the least flattering message there is. You are lost. Why? Because of you. You can be made right with God. How? By coming to God with your sin and receiving a gift of salvation that Christ provided. So what can I do to get it? Receive it. Can't I do something to earn it, even just a little bit? Nope.

Not very flattering is it. About all I can say is, yeah, I sinned real good. I am good at sinning. Hard to squeeze flattery in that message.

Now greed **could** be a motive. Even **now** it is possible to be a very good preacher but be a **hireling** at the same time. The motives for why a person might do both could be mixed. But a preacher could hide a greed motive. But Paul's motive was clear because even when he had **a right** to money, he **would not take it**. He **could** have. But by not taking it he could prove his motives.

**6 Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.**

Paul was even sure about his **power** motives. Again, he could look at the evidence of the decisions he made. If he had made demands, (and some of them he may have had a **right** to make), that would have been ok. But by **not making demands that would have benefited him**, Paul could know that he was doing the **right thing** for the **right reason**. He left reason for no one, not even himself, to doubt his pure motives.

Jesus taught us that our motives are least open to suspicion when we remove **any possibility of fleshly benefit**. Among other things Christ told us to pray, fast and give money **in secret**. Then we can know we are doing it because our Father in heaven sees.

Now consider just for a second how you might act if you were an apostle? They were the top dogs in the church. They have pillars in the new temple. If anyone could have been a big shot, they could have. But you would have never ever guessed that Paul had **that position** in the body of Christ by the way he acted. You might guess quicker that he was the janitor. He was a work horse of a man and never used his position to make his life easy. Sometimes he had to use his position to make his life livable. But he never abused his privilege. Are we ever upset that people don't glorify our ministries or make more of them? Maybe we would be helped by the school of Paul.

**7 But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.**

Paul gives more evidence that evil motives were not the driving force in his ministry. Power hungry people are not known for their **gentleness** towards others. People demanding **attention** and **benefit** are not normally the kindest of people. They are often **abrasive** and **confrontive** and **demanding**. Not Paul. He describes himself with feminine characteristics. He was fostering these people. He was tender while meeting their needs. They are precious to him. They are not things to be used. They are precious lambs to be loved.



What does a mother gain when she gives up sleep every night, when she is concerned about any twist and turn in the child's health, when she gives up those things **she wants** so the child can have what **they need**? We could go on and on. She doesn't do those things for the **best mom medal** or for the privilege of being promoted to head honcho in the household. No. There is a different motive. Love. That is why Paul describes his ministry this way. No one mistakes those motives.

**8 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.**

Paul makes a very persuasive point so there is **no doubt**. Why did we do what we did? Well first, because we answer for you. (?) But in the process we became affectionately desirous of you. Isn't that a great pastoral trait. I don't think I have ever seen that in a job description for a pastor. But maybe it should be.

To be hired as the Ferndale Preacher you must be able to preach, teach, and be affectionately desirous of us.

That is what Paul was.

Now it appears not every church got this kind of review. Paul adds a because. **Because you had become very dear to us.**

How do you think you become dear to someone? Well, what people are **dear to you**? Why are they that way to you? That might be worthy of thinking about. What makes **others dear to me**? Who do I want to be dear to? What do I need to change? How can I do that better?

I often say that if I would think like you think, I would feel like you feel. And there is a lot of truth to that. It isn't an absolute given our dispositions. But it is largely true. I say it to make the point that we are not victims to our feelings nearly as much as we might think. We often create them by our thinking.

Well the same thing is true in how people receive us. If I think that people respond to me in a certain way because my name is Jon Zeigler and I look a certain way and sound a certain way, I am largely mistaken. It is very rare that a person singles me out to reject me based on who I am. It is what I say and do that creates an affect in them. If you treated people like I treat people, they would largely respond to you the same way they respond to me. The opposite is true as well. If I treated people like you treat people, they would respond to me much the same as they respond to you. If you don't like how people respond to you, instead of first blaming them for how they respond,

first look at yourself and ask **what am I doing to cause this response?** Much more is gained by **changing how we treat people** than by **blaming them for how they treat us**. We have the power to change ourselves. We have no power to change others.

These people in Thessalonica had weaseled their way into Paul's heart in just a few weeks. They must have been some exceptional people.

And look at Paul's heart toward them.

This wasn't **just a job** of sharing the gospel and mechanically discipling these people. No. He loved them. He wanted to be with them. He wanted to share his life with them. He was just glad to be around them.

It is so good when church is like that. It is so good when the distinction between the leaders and the rest of the members is **so small** because that distinction is **so rarely needed**. It is so good when our common love for Christ removes so many obstacles to fellowship. It is so good when sharing our time, money or life with each other is not so much an obligation as a privilege. I think that is what Paul is describing here.

For an application, maybe we can ask ourselves a few questions.

If my ministry is attacked or unappreciated by those around me, how can I respond like Paul did?

If motives are so important, should we not spend the time it takes to be sure of ours before we affirm to people that they are good?

What simple things do people do that make them dear to us? What would change in my relationships if I chose to do those same things to others?

Maybe the Lord laid a different application on you as well. Go with it.