

Live Lives Worthy of God

Hello dear listeners:

Leaders are under great scrutiny in our society. All their words and actions are weighed and when they are not what people expect, the criticism can be swift and devastating. People love to criticize those who have positions of leadership, whether it is in our nation, at work, or in the church. Now it true that those who have been entrusted with leadership receive a trust they have to uphold. It is equally true that those who are being governed or led need to see beyond the actual person who gives leadership, to the God who is above all. Both leaders and those who are being led are under his rule. That applies in the state, it also applies in the church. Leaders who use their position for their own glory are not faithful to their Master. People who disregard leadership are rebelling against our Lord and King as well. But faithful leaders are a blessing to those put in their charge.

I say this because in 1 Thessalonians 2 Paul and his helpers speak a lot about themselves. It sounds as if they did everything right. Is Paul above criticism? No. No human being is. But the apostle wants to show what God is doing in and through the work of his servants. It is not about Paul and his helpers in the first place, but about the God who is using Paul and his helpers to calling people into his kingdom.

Now when someone calls you, then your reaction will show the importance of the person who calls and the call itself. The more important the call, the more eager you are to receive it! God calls us too by his Word, the gospel of Christ crucified. It is a serious and

earnest call; it comes with the demand to repent and believe. But that call comes through his servants who proclaim the Word. This has many implications for preachers and for those who listen to them. God is calling us into his kingdom and glory.

The words of Chapter 2 flow out of chapter 1. Paul and his helpers have expressed their joy for God's work in Thessalonica. Their faith is at work, their love is prompting them and their hope inspires them. As church they are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. But this is result also of how the work began in Thessalonica. So after having addressed the present state of the church in chapter 1, they now go back to the very beginning of this congregation. That beginning was also God's work. "For you know brothers that our visit was not a failure." It was God coming into their lives with his powerful Word, calling them to live lives worthy of his kingdom and glory. How does God do this?

As Paul and his helpers look back at this beginning they do two things. First they show what they did not do: trying to trick the people in Thessalonica. Second they show what they did do: lead them in the right way. The first has to do with their willingness to deny themselves, and the image of a caring mother is used. "We were gentle along you, like a mother caring for her children." For the other, the leading them in the right way, the image of a father is mentioned. "For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his children." And in all this it is God who is calling them into his kingdom and glory.

So let's start with the first, Paul and his helpers mention what they did not do: they did not try to pull a fast one on the Thessalonians in order to use the Thessalonians for their own ambitions and greed.

Verse 3: “the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to tick you.” “What we brought was not a false teaching and we did not have a hidden agenda when we brought you into obedience to Jesus Christ. Nor did we try to trick you by crafty reasoning to try to get you in our power. We did not use catchy advertising techniques to draw you in. The opposite is true. We are men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.” God doesn’t give his gospel just to anyone. You have to be approved. By the way this is why in the church we need to make sure that those who bring the Word indeed have been approved and are about reproach. After all they are entrusted with the gospel.

The text goes on explaining what they did not do: they did not try to please people. That is always a danger for leaders, to please people rather than pleasing God. Then you listen to people rather than to God. Nor did Paul and his helpers try to gain financially from their task. Their goal was not to line their own pockets, but to please God. Oh, they could have asked for money if they wanted, but they did not want to be a burden to the believers there. It is like a mother caring for her children. A mother cares and gives care. She gives, already at the very beginning of a new life. As the child grows up, she continues to give. And when the child grows and does well, then the mother is thankful. Paul says: “That is how we were: denying ourselves, willing to give ourselves, working hard so that you did not have to support us. We were no burden to you. In that way you could focus completely on the gospel we preach.” Leaders should not put their own person make central as they fulfil their task, but the growing and blossoming of the congregation. Yes, that requires self-denial, but then you give the example of Christ.

The second part of this passage speaks about what the apostles did do. In vs. 10: “You are witnesses and so is God.” Their work in the church was done in a way that the congregation could see it. They are not ashamed of it. They were holy, righteous and blameless. Holy means that in what they did they were dedicated to God. Righteous means that they did it according to God’s will. It was upright. Blameless points to the fact that the people could not blame them for being ungodly or self-centred.

Are Paul and his helpers without fault? No, but in bringing the Word they are faithful to God who calls. Are office-bearers without fault? No. They are sinners too. Daily they have to ask for forgiveness. Can they misuse their position? Yes. This is why the church of Christ needs to have a procedure in place to deal with this in the proper way and so protect the congregation. Those who bring the word should do it in a way that complements the message.

Yes, that Word may cause pain, not all who hear the Word are equally happy about it. The reason is that the Word also addresses our sins. The Word may have to make clear that we have to change or deny ourselves. After all the purpose of the call is that we live lives worthy of God. In that connected the image of the father is used. Verse 11: “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you live lives worthy of God who calls you.” Fathers are called to give leadership, to teach and give direction. In a similar way the apostles gave leadership to the believers. Why did they do this? To make their own little kingdoms? No, so that congregation would live lives worthy of God. The last words bring this out: God calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Leadership is easily criticized, also leadership in the church. Let's not follow that trend. The Bible shows us what is expected of leaders and what is expected of congregations, namely to recognize the place of our Lord and King. He entrusts his servants with his gospel and commands them to preach it faithfully. It pleases God to bring about his work through the service of people. He calls us all to believe in him. His call is that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This call comes to us all with the command to repent and believe. The purpose is so that God's kingdom may come in glory. Obey this call and experience this glory. Amen and thank you very much for listening.