

Fact Sheet for “An Example to Follow” I Thessalonians 2:1-12

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When I read the Bible I look for things that are said about God, Who He is and how He has interacted with people. I seek out theological truths about us, for instance we are all sinners. Then there are truths about the Bible itself, how this world was created, God's promises for the future, and many other things. I am keenly alert to the directives of Scripture, such as "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). In these I find fertile ground for application. Today we have before us another type of passage. We will be looking at Paul's own example. The challenge will be to imitate him.

Paul builds on what he wrote in 1:4-5. He now expands his thoughts.

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.**

“in vain” - empty, futile, without result

The account of what happened at to Paul and Silas at Philippi is in Acts 16:11-40. In Philippi they first met Lydia at a place of prayer. She was a seller of purple fabrics and a worshipper of God, and later believed. Later, while again going to that place of prayer Paul cast a spirit of divination out of a slave girl who brought her masters much profit. Her masters then dragged Paul and Silas before the Roman authorities. Then they were beaten with rods and thrown into prison, and had their feet fastened in stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were singing and the prisoners were listening. Then an earthquake freed everyone. The jailer awoke and was about to commit suicide because of the demands of Roman law, but later he and his household believed. When the authorities found out they were Roman citizens, and that they as civil authorities had broken the law in beating them, they begged them to leave the city. After again visiting Lydia they came to Thessalonica. Paul and Silas got into hot water for declaring the truth of the gospel in Philippi. But this did not dampen their boldness in the next city, Thessalonica.

The gospel is truth. This world would like us to say that everybody wins, everybody is OK, all religions are paths to God, and everybody goes to heaven. But the truth of the gospel is that everybody doesn't win, only the good news of the gospel is true, and there is the warning that if you don't place your faith in Jesus Christ in this life you will end up in hell in the next. Paul and Silas were bold enough to go on declaring this gospel in Thessalonica even after they were imprisoned in Philippi. How bold are you?

The account of what happened then at Thessalonica is in Acts 17:1-10. They were only there three weeks declaring the gospel in the local synagogue. The Jews who did not believe formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. They attacked the house of Jason, where they were staying. Not finding Paul and Silas they dragged Jason before the authorities. The brethren then hurried Paul and Silas out of the city.

What happened to them in these two cities provides the historical backdrop for the next two verses.

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.

“error” – what is not true, “impurity” – moral uncleanness, deception - fraud

There are two words in verse four that translate the same verb, but in two different tenses... “approved” and “tests”. This is because this verb means “approved by testing”. It is the same word used in Romans 12:2. But be sure to see that their goal was first and foremost to please God who tested and proved their hearts. Everyone who has any ministry should serve with the same mindset! Unfortunately they don’t.

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.

This shows Paul’s pastoral side. Consider what Paul and Silas went through because of their desire to please God and their concern for the Thessalonians.

I am reminding myself, I am speaking for our elders, and I am doing my best to persuade you... seek this kind of heart in your life and ministry. Sometimes it will mean that you put yourself last for the sake of your spouse, your children, the body of Christ, and others. Your choice to do this may be in some minor decision (like choosing to be last in line at a potluck) or it may be in a major decision that will affect the course of your life.

⁹ ¶ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Again, the care shown by Paul and Silas shows through these words.

Remember the first verse of this chapter where Paul said that his coming to them was not in vain? It would have been vain if Paul and Silas had come to them with the wrong motives, if these two had not boldly declared to them the gospel, and if the Thessalonians had not responded in belief.

This passage calls us to become imitators of Paul and Silas in having this kind of heart in our service for others.