

Character in a Man of God

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

I. Introduction

- A. More importantly than having natural abilities is having character as a foundation and a lifestyle.
1. Anyone can be taught how to teach, but when it comes to character, either you have it or you don't. There's nothing which defines a man or minister more than his character. The Bible holds out the group of pastors and elders as those who are to serve as models of Christian maturity. All the qualifications for an elder or pastor or even just a man desiring to live a godly life, *aside from teaching and not being a new convert, are related to character.*
- B. When you have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, your life becomes more complicated. It would be nice to think that when we become Christians that life not only gets easier but that we are somehow instantaneously transformed into a man who neither desires sin nor sins any longer. Of course, though this may be our desire, it certainly is not the truth. Living the Christian life is simply a war as you seek to live counter to all the world holds dear.

II. The Book

- A. I want to take a moment and do a brief overview¹ of the book *The Pillars of Christian Character*.
1. The first 5 chapters are really the basic pillars of Christian character.
 - These chapters seek to define, explain and illustrate what faith, obedience, humility, love and unity are in the life of the believer.
 2. Chapter 6 deals with growth and how this is not a suggestion in the New Testament, but it is a command for all believers.
 - In the Bible there is much weight and responsibility given to those who are born again. From the moment of salvation, you begin a journey in which the Holy Spirit will convict, lead and direct you. But, you too must put in the effort. This is not a "let go and let God" type of life. I think Paul captures this idea in **Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."**

¹ The overview is found in the introduction on page 9.

- This is a pretty complicated verse. Paul died and Christ is living in him, but Paul is living in the flesh. This is how our Christian life should be characterized as well. By faith, we live for Christ by the power of Christ, but we are the ones who are actually here living.

3. Chapters 7-9 talk about how to display the attitudes of forgiveness, joy and thankfulness.

4. Chapter 10 focuses on spiritual strength.

- He grounds this in **2 Timothy 2:1** “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

i. While he talks about verses 2-7 and giving the examples which Paul uses as an athlete, soldier and farmer...I want to focus on verse 1.

ii. **As believers, we are to *be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.***

a. **The verb *be strong* is imperative (a command) and passive (it is a resource for you to use not one that you have to come up with).**

b. This means Paul commands Timothy (and us) to be strong by means of grace in Christ.

c. We do not have to conjure up strength or might, but rely on the means which have already been provided for us in Christ.

5. Chapters 11-13 cover self-discipline, worship and hope.

III. Instead of going through a list of things from the pastoral epistles or another section of Scripture, I want to look at Paul in action.

A. Paul was a church planter with the heart of a pastor and just like all of us, a real love for the people in the church. He not only wanted to teach the things of Christ but also desired to live them out in his daily life. Paul understood one basic principle, ***if the fruit of the tree is good, so are the roots...if the fruit is rotten, so are the roots.***

B. What does this mean for us men who desire to be used by God and live a life which honors and glorifies Him? This means we need to be very careful in our daily life. We not only need to have a good foundation but also a God honoring, Christ proclaiming, Spirit led daily life. Therefore, Paul told Timothy in **1 Timothy 4:16** ‘Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.’ The life of the pastor/elder, church leader, husband, father is one which should be marked with a high regard for the calling, for doctrine and for truth.

C. We’re going to be in **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12**. Paul lays out his heart and attitude towards the church there. Paul went to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, spending only three weeks there. He was chased out by a band of Jews who were intent on keeping him quiet. He wrote this letter from Corinth when he stayed there for about 2 years on this same journey.

D. Before we look at these verses, look at **1 Thessalonians 1:5** 'For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.' Really, **verses 1-12** of chapter 2 explain in detail what kind of men Paul and his companions were when they came to this city to plant a church. Don't leave Paul's description of himself in the Bible, thinking it's only for him...take what he says and see if you adhere to the same character standard as he did.

IV. Verse 1: Pure Motives to Start

- A. First, we must look at why Paul went to Thessalonica. He says his *coming to them was not in vain*.
1. If his motives weren't pure, neither will be his actions. He reassures them his coming was not w/o substance or character.
 2. He had pure motives in mind when he came.
 3. The word for vain means *without result* or *without effect*.
 4. Paul is saying that they came with a purpose and that the effects which the church saw proves their pure motives.
 5. That is why he can say *You yourselves know...*
- B. This is a great place for us to also start...why are you here? Not the deep philosophical question of our existence, but why are you here receiving training?
1. Can you, like Paul, say your motives are pure. You desire to know more about Christ and learn more about how to serve Him in the church and in your families. Or, do you hope this will help you gain recognition in the church?
 2. ***Only you can answer that question.***

V. Verse 2: Confidence in God's Power

- A. Paul came from Philippi to Thessalonica. If you remember this encounter from **Acts 16**, there was a demon possessed slave girl who Paul commanded the demon to come out of. She had been a money-making machine for her owners, but w/o the demon, they lost money.
- B. So, Paul was thrown into jail and severely beaten with rods.
- C. Through that, the Philippian jailer was born again, and Paul and his companions were set free.
- D. What Paul means in **verse 2** is that even though they were persecuted in Philippi for the gospel message, they didn't change the message in Thessalonica.
1. He was just as bold in Thessalonica as he was in Philippi, he didn't care about the persecution which came upon him...he had confidence in the power of God.
 2. ***This will be a true test for each of you.*** Each of you will be tested to change the message of the gospel in order to either bring less persecution on yourself or attempt to please more people.

3. I'm sure I don't have to explain it, but the gospel of God will continue to bring conflict into our culture until the day we're all called home.
 - ***Paul knew he had the truth b/c of the conflict it brought.*** If the world loved the message, it wouldn't have been a heavenly message. We're told in **1 John 3:13 'Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.'**
4. It should never be a shock or a stumbling block to you when the world dismisses your message of the gospel. It should never stop us from sharing with people or stop us from having confidence in the power of God.
5. What we need today is men who have a holy boldness to preach the uncompromised gospel without fear of what people will say.
6. If people are going to be offended, let them be offended by the truth.

VI. Verse 3: Committed to God's truth

- A. Paul's now showing his **integrity** in his ministry to the Thessalonians by what he didn't do.
- B. **Firstly**, the message he gave didn't come from **error**.
 1. This means Paul was not wandering away from the truth in order to make the message more palatable. As I said before, he didn't change the message to fit his circumstances.
- C. **Secondly**, the message Paul gave was not from **uncleanness**.
 1. This word, *uncleanness*, means to have impure motives. He wasn't there b/c of some secret sin he was holding in his heart. There wasn't something he was holding back for them.
- D. **Thirdly**, Paul had no **deceit** in him. This word is also translated **trickery**.
 1. He wasn't trying to get something out of the people or trying to make them follow him. What you see is what you get with Paul.
 2. This is probably one of the greatest errors facing the church today, pastors and church movements who use deceit and trickery to gain followers.
 3. We live in an age where discernment is at an all-time low and unsuspecting people will follow anything that has an appearance of the supernatural.
 4. We have people who claim to have gold teeth from God, there are churches that promote gold dust from God, others who claim bizarre spiritual activity...these things are trickery to get more and more followers and therefore more money.
- E. ***Each of you will face this temptation in the ministry*** and will have the choice to either stay with the truth and allow Christ to work or go off the narrow path and try and do it on your own.

- F. *These three things, error, uncleanness and deceit, will tear you up in ministry.* Each of them is an inward character but will always come out in how you treat the people. There are no sins which are hidden from the Lord, even those in our hearts.
- G. Paul wasn't in the ministry for his own benefit, but to glorify God. He knew that by spreading the gospel message, the true gospel, people would be converted.
1. When they're converted, God's glorified and the angels rejoice.

Verses 4-5: Authority and Accountability

- Paul says **BUT**, now he's contrasting what he just said. He didn't come with error, uncleanness or deceit, *but* rather he came with God's authority and approval.
- Make no mistake, we live in a time which looks down upon absolutes and authority. We want to do what we want to do. *That can't be in the ministry nor can it be in the church.*
- Paul says with great confidence that he was approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.
- **How can Paul say such a thing?** How can we know the same thing about ourselves today?
- Paul had a healthy view of the omniscience of God. The fact that God's all-knowing.
 - He knows our thoughts, our motives and our desires. They were approved of God not b/c they had some innate worthiness but solely because of God's amazing grace.
 - Paul said in **2 Corinthians 4:2** *'But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.'*
 - Paul knew that in everything he did or said, it was ultimately God who was testing the heart. Nothing escapes the eyes of the Lord.
- This is why the Psalmist writes in **Psalm 139:1-4** *'O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.'*
- Because Paul had such a high view of God, to be dishonest was unthinkable to him.
- **How's your view of God?** Do you bring God down to your level and elevate yourself or do you view God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe? The One who knows all and sees all?
- Paul had no desire to please the men to whom he was preaching to, but only wanted to please God. Our high calling is to do the will of the Father, even if it means that people don't like us.
- In **verse 5**, Paul continues his argument for his authority from God. Paul knew that one day he was going to give an account for his life before God.

- The writer of Hebrews says in **Hebrews 13:17** 'Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.' Don't think that just because you have a position of leadership or you may desire a position you are off the hook somehow. You are going to be scrutinized even more when you stand before God.
- This is why Paul can say he did not use flattering words to simply tickle their ears, but he preached Christ and Him crucified.
- He wasn't using the ministry as a means for personal gain nor was he trying to enrich himself. There was no selfish ambition in Paul when he was at Thessalonica.

Verse 6: Consumed with God's glory

- Here is, what I believe, to be the heart of Paul's whole argument. Paul came and ministered there not for his own gain, not for money, not for prestige, not to impress men and not for his own glory. **Paul came for the glory of God.**
- He shows his own humility by making no demands that he could have made. He was an apostle, he was busy spreading the gospel, but he did not care about all of that, he only concerned himself with glorifying God in all he did.
- Let this be a lesson for each of us. If you're in the ministry to have the title pastor or elder or to be able to stand in front of people, your desires are wrong and not for God.
- **The ends never justify the means.** The way we do something for God is more important than the results. The ministry is not a results-oriented business.
 - If you're consumed with the things of the world or the approval of man, you're going to slowly drift off the path.
 - If you set unrealistic standards for yourself, you're going to start to try and do ministry the way you want to do it.
 - If you are here this afternoon and just want to grow in your faith, do so for the glory of God. Learn how to put these things in action in your daily life with work, friends, family, etc.
- God's glory is the goal of all things and is the source and sum of all full and lasting joy. When we live a life which is constantly focusing on glorifying God, ***we'll be in lack of nothing***. When we understand that everything which comes upon us is there to bring God glory, we'll have a life which is ***marked by contentment***.
- **Paul knew, and so should we, that elevating God is the greatest act we can do in this life and the thing which will also be the bedrock for our character.**

- If we desire to glorify God, we'll live a life which is above reproach and a life which is blameless. There'll be no need for shortcuts b/c our focus is God and His glory.

In **verses 7-12**, we see the actions of Paul as he ministers to the glory of God.

In **verse 7**, he was gentle as a nursing mother with her own children.

- Instead of being greedy and demanding they do what Paul said, he was gentle. He was unselfish and kind as he dealt with them.
- The nursing mother is prepared to do anything to protect her child. She comforts and loves the child unconditionally. She spends time with the child, is tender and loving towards the child.
 - The point is the same thing which Paul told Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:24–25** 'And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth.'
- Paul's ministry to the Thessalonians was marked with gentleness and b/c of that there was thriving church planted there that lasted until 904 A.D. The church survived there and actually earned the title 'the Orthodox City.'

In **verse 8**, Paul says he was *affectionately longing* for them and he was *well pleased* to not only give them the gospel but also his own life.

- Here's a true test of character for the servant of God, are you only willing to share the gospel with the people or will you also impart your lives to them?
- There was a deep and longing for love between this church and Paul. This is what gives our message of the gospel visible power, our love for the people.
 - You see, those who seek to trick the people and are only in it for their own gain and don't spend time with the people. If we see people as a bother in our own life, then our motives are not pure, and our character is corrupted.
 - People aren't commodities, they aren't disturbances and they aren't problems to be solved, they're created in the image of God and need the gospel of God.
- Here's the point Paul's making...if we're to preach the gospel with any effectiveness at all, we must live it out ourselves. Our time, our resources, the things which the Lord's entrusted to us must be used to that end.
- We can't be hypocrites and tell people to live a Christ-centered life and then live our own life in such a way which dishonors God.

- This includes your family, your work and the church.
- The things we do should go to only strengthen our message.
- **Therefore, it's important for you to get to know our church on an intimate level.** You must go out of your way for them, make time for them and show them how much you care for them.
 - You gain respect from the people you minister to by the time you put into them.

In **verse 9**, Paul calls on his past actions to show his heart towards them.

- He worked hard when he was there so he wasn't a burden to anyone.
- There will be times in the ministry and in your life where your own fatigue or weariness will be a temptation for you to take the easy way out.
- Look at what Paul says here, he labored and toiled day and night, not only for work but also to preach to them the gospel.
- This goes directly to your character as a servant of the Lord. What are you willing to do for the Lord? If your job or career is the priority in your life, then you'll work yourself hard there and take it easy when it comes to things of the Lord.
 - But, if the glory of God is your priority, then you'll work hard at your job *and* when it comes to ministry you will have strength as well.
- Guys, ministry is hard work and the devil will come to you when you're at your weakest point.

Remember Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days.

- We're told in **Matthew 4:2** that Jesus had fasted 40 days and nights and then in **verse 3** it says that Satan came to Him to tempt Him.
- This will be the same with you in ministry, your guard will be down and your defenses are weakened...that's when we're attacked.
- **Always be on guard and ready for the fight, keep your character strong for the glory of God.**

In **verses 10-12**, Paul ends with more examples of their conduct when he was with them.

- In **verse 10** he goes back to calling God as his witness for how he acted.
- He says he acted devoutly, justly and blamelessly.
 - **Devoutly** means holy, it means to act in a manner characteristic of moral purity.
 - They behaved like men who were separated unto God for His service.
 - **Justly** means to act righteously.
 - This means they were fair and did all things according to the law and strived to always make the right choices.

- **Blamelessly** means to live in a way which is free from guilt.
 - Their lives were not marked by scandal or offence but with love and grace.
- **Everything which can cast a bad shadow on our Christian testimony needs to be immediately cut off and destroyed.**
 - We need to take care to not be marked with those who are of this world. In our day and age we need to be vigilant about what we do and where we are.
 - You may think people don't care about your character, you may even think doing some things will make you even more relevant to the world, but we must remember that we're always before God.
 - There's no exception, our actions must always reflect the holiness and righteousness of God.
- In **verses 11-12**, Paul says he exhorted (encouraged), comforted and charged (urged) them.
- He **encouraged** them.
 - Discouragement makes it harder to resist temptation and fall into sin. **Hebrews 3:13** '...but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.'
 - Paul knew this, and his character was such that he wanted to be sure they stayed the course.
- He also **comforted** them in their walk with the Lord.
 - To comfort someone is to give them emotional strength and to help alleviate sorrow and distress. He was there to listen to them.
 - This comes from an unselfish heart. A heart that has others as its focus.
- He **charged or urged** them.
 - This was Paul the cheerleader, the Thessalonians greatest fan. Paul wanted them to reach the finish line and was there to make sure they did.
- **What was the goal of this?** We read in **verse 12**, that they would walk **worthy of God** who called them into His own kingdom and glory.
- Paul had an end in mind, **a goal** for the people he was ministering to. He desired them to live a life which was glorifying to God.
 - Paul's eyes were not fixed on himself or his own circumstances, but on making sure those whom God placed around him would walk in a manner worthy of the gospel.
- This is a common theme throughout Paul's letters, to walk worthy.
 - He says in **Ephesians 4:1** 'I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.'

- **Philippians 1:27** 'Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.'
- **Colossians 1:10** '...that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.'
- John says in **1 John 2:6** 'He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.'
- The importance of our lifestyle can never be underestimated when it comes to our ministry, our testimony and our character.
- We can easily be disqualified from ministry and ultimately ineffective because of the choices we make, the things we do or the people we hang out with.

The question that I want to finish with is why...*why could Paul have such a high moral standard for his character and why should we?*

- Here's the key to Christian character, trust in the Lord. This goes all the way back to Adam and Eve in the garden. They didn't trust that God was taking care of them. They believed that God was withholding something good from them, so they sinned.
- Paul's faith and trust was solely on God and God alone. He knew that God never withheld the things he needed and that nothing came to Paul which God didn't first ordain.
- You see, our character will be smeared when we lose trust in God.
- From the beginning of his interactions in Thessalonica, Paul could've lost his trust in God. He came from hard times in Philippi and if he would've let that dictate his attitude, the church there never would've come to existence.
- The Psalmist says in **Psalm 28:7** 'The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him.'
- Our lack of faith and trust in God will always, always lead us to sin. When we lack these, we will try and do it in our own strength and design and end up in trouble.