

Paul's mission

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Date: 13 June 2021

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Good to see you. Well, in 2021, where we find ourselves now Christians, are certainly at no shortage of Bible teaching, of access to Bible teaching.

Even before COVID, it was quite easy to go online and find Bible teaching from your favorite Bible teacher. There was a lot of options. There's now during and after COVID even more because every Bible teacher and his dog has to learn how to now teach online.

Even our sermons are online to give access to those who can't come to church at the moment. And so we have more than ever before in history, God's people have wide access to numerous Bible teachers.

And of course, that has a lot of advantages. We can get different views and different styles of teaching on passages in Scripture.

But at the same time as the advantages of having so much access to Bible teaching online, there are also some very serious dangers to that. Because just as easy as it is to find good Bible teaching online, so is it easy to be taught the wrong thing without realizing it.

[1 : 26] And so the question that we've got to learn to ask ourselves as Christians, more than ever before in history, is what criteria can we use to determine who we should be listening to and who we shouldn't be listening to?

It's a very important question, isn't it? How can you, as a listener to God's Word, determine who you should be listening to? That's the question we're going to be looking at this morning, because it's exactly the question that Paul answers in this chapter 1, Thessalonians 2.

It's all about that. All about how to choose your teachers. And of course, because of that, this is one of the many passages in Scripture that as I prepare to preach it during the week and as I study it, it first speaks to me as a preacher before it speaks to anyone else.

And it speaks to all who teach, first and foremost. In any capacity, whether you're a Bible study leader, whether you teach people the Bible one-to-one, this passage has something to say to all of us, because it convicts us and challenges us to make sure we are people who are worthy of being listened to, that we are the right teachers.

But you'll also see that for anybody who sits under preaching of the Word, this passage is relevant. It's just as important for you being taught, so that you can ask yourself, how can I know that this person is worth listening to?

[3 : 02] And so Paul here tells the Thessalonians just why they should be listening to him, and they should be listening to his message, as opposed to all the other voices that they would have been hearing.

And so what we're going to do is we're going to look at this passage in two parts. Firstly, what is the proof of an authentic messenger of the Word? And then also, what is the proof that the message itself is authentic?

And so let's have a look at this passage in those categories. Firstly, the proof of an authentic messenger. That's what Paul goes on to describe in this chapter.

And it's worth having a little bit of background into why the Thessalonians in particular needed to hear this, why this passage is in Thessalonians. And he stresses it so much here more than in any of his other letters.

Well, the reason is partly geographic, and where Thessalonica was. And so behind me you'll see a map. And on the map is this big orange line, which is actually in the first century, it was one of the major highways east-west through the Roman Empire.

[4 : 10] It was called the Via Ignatia. And Thessalonica, you'll see where that... Oh, I put an arrow there earlier. Anyway, it's right in the middle. You can see it above the Aegean Sea. That's where

Thessalonica is.

It was right in the middle of this major Roman highway. It was one of the major stops on the highway. And so it had a lot of traffic from all corners of the empire coming through Thessalonica. They had a lot of different visitors. It was a very cosmopolitan city. And one of the types of people who used to come through Thessalonica were traveling speakers, traveling orators.

It was a very popular thing in the ancient Greek world for these... They were celebrities, the celebrities of the day. They were speakers. They were philosophers. And they would come, go from town to town, and set up in the town square.

And then people would come and pay to listen to them. It was the main form of entertainment of the day. They didn't have Netflix and the things that entertain us. So they would be very excited when one of these traveling speakers came.

[5 : 13] And they would be masters of rhetoric and being able to express words in very fanciful ways and grab people's attention. And that's what they were used to. And they would pay these people to do it.

So they would charge, and that's how they would make their living. And so when Paul and the apostles came along to Thessalonica, on the same road, they were traveling from the east to the west. They came to Thessalonica on this Via Ignatia.

It was assumed that they were just another set of traveling orators. And they came with this fancy word that they wanted to get money for, and then they would move on.

And because of the small amount of time they spent in Thessalonica before, they were kicked out, and they had to flee for their lives. It would have been assumed by the people they left, a lot of the people they left, that, oh, they were actually just sending it for themselves.

They were just these traveling speakers, and they moved on, and they don't really care about us.

And so that's the background. That's why Paul is writing what he's writing here. And one of the main things he wants to say to these Thessalonians is, we are not that.

[6 : 21] We are very different to that. We are not who you think we are. We came for an entirely different reason. And so he says, follow from verse 2, 1 Thessalonians chapter 2.

On the contrary, after we had previously suffered and were treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, we were emboldened by our God to speak the gospel of God to you in spite of great opposition.

For our exhortation didn't come from error or impurity or an intent to deceive. Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak not to please people, but rather God who examines our hearts.

For we never used flattering speech, as you know, or had greedy motives. God is our witness. And we didn't seek glory from people, either from you or from others.

So, the point he's making here is that, listen, Thessalonians, if we were just in this for what we could get out of it, like all these other speakers you hear, would we have gone through all that we went through to come to you and bring this message to you?

[7 : 36] I don't think so. And that right there, actually, is the first trait of an authentic Bible teacher, an authentic messenger of the gospel. They're not in it for what they can get out of it.

And that's Paul's point to these Thessalonians. And then what he does, he goes on and uses two metaphors to hammer the point home. He says, firstly, they were like a mother to the Thessalonians.

Look at verse 7. Although we could have been a burden as Christ's apostles, instead we were gentle among you as a nursing mother nurtures her own children.

That's an interesting illustration he uses. What does he mean? Well, not many mothers have children to make a profit, right?

Not many mothers have children for what they can get out of it. I've never heard a mother going to, or a woman going to her husband saying, you know, we should really have a child.

[8 : 38] I hear they're cash cows. No, they don't have children for what they can get out of it. In fact, a mother's love is one of the best examples that you can get in this world of undeserved love, isn't it?

Undeserved. I mean, think of what a mother goes through to have a child and to raise a child. Their first introduction to their child is excruciating pain, followed by a number of months of sleep deprivation, and then about 18 years of servitude.

And throughout that, they still love their child. I mean, it's amazing. It's miraculous, isn't it? That's supernatural love. They love this child that spends most of their time leeching off them. And yet they love them irrespective and undeservingly. That is the love of a mother. And that is how the apostles brought the gospel to these Thessalonians.

They weren't in it for profit. They weren't in it for what they could get out of it. But they were in it because of love for these people that they had never even met before they came there.

[9 : 50] They love for God to make His name known, to make Jesus known, and love for these people to give them the only way of salvation.

That's what the apostles were in it for. And that's it. Not for what they could get out of it. So they were like a mother in that way. But also, they go on to say they were like a father.

Have a look at verse 11 and 12. As you know, like a father with his own children, we encouraged, comforted, and employed each one of you to live worthy of God.

Who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. So they were like a mother on one hand, and they were also like a father on the other hand. In the ancient world, especially, fathers were the ones who were responsible for the moral upbringing of their children, for their behavior in the world around them, and for their socializing.

The father had to prepare their child to be a useful member of society. And I think, even today, instinctively, fathers are a little less nurturing than mothers, aren't they?

[10 : 58] They're more preparatory. They want to prepare their children for the big, scary world out there. And that's why you'll often hear a wife go to her husband, you shouldn't be so rough with the children.

Yes, I should! Because they need toughening up for the world. That's a father's instinct, isn't it? And that's what the apostles did with the Thessalonians.

They prepared them for the persecution they were going to receive by following Christ. And they prepared them to be citizens of God's kingdom. By, as he says here, exhorting and encouraging them.

Spurring them on to kingdom living. You know, the Bible says we should spur one another on. The Bible teaches, especially, should spur on congregations to love and good deeds, to living kingdom lives.

And the whole idea of spurring on, you know what a spur is? It's uncomfortable. It's the thing that makes the horse move forward. And so, the apostles would tell them uncomfortable truths as well to prepare them for life in the kingdom.

[12 : 03] And that certainly wasn't like the traveling orators who used to come on the Via Ignatia. Because those guys, to get money, they had to tell people what they wanted to hear, not what they had to hear.

And those are two very different things, aren't they? Much like the entertainment industry in the world today. Hollywood. The entertainment industry isn't there to convict you and to change you. The entertainment industry is there to entertain you and get your money, and they do that by telling you what you want to hear. They do that by sending messages that society accepts as the norm. They don't want to step out of line. They want to be politically correct. That's how they make their money. That's how these traveling speakers would make their money. But that's certainly not what Paul and the apostles and genuine Bible teachers do.

They don't tell people what they want to hear. They tell people what they need to hear. Sadly, though, that's not the case for a lot of Christian preachers today.

[13 : 09] A lot. Ever since the beginning, ever since the apostles first started, there were preachers and teachers who would come along and use the Bible, use God's words, in order to get popularity for themselves or to make a profit.

And it hasn't changed in 2,000 years. You see exactly the same today, don't you? Think of the prosperity gospel, which is a scourge. It's a cancer. In our own continent, Africa especially, where you get these fancy speakers in their fancy suits, rocking up with their fancy expensive cars to halls packed with poor people.

And then they tell them a message, and they use the Bible to support their message that if you pay the pastor as an act of faith, then God will bless you financially.

And it's a scam. It's one of the most prolific scams in our continent, in our world, and people are misusing God's word in order to make a profit.

And they're in it only for what they can get out. And it's evil. But you also see over the sea, in kind of the West, in USA especially, you see on the other side preachers who are in it for what they can get out, but more in terms of popularity, more in terms of YouTube views, and going viral, and filling up their halls with people, and being famous, and becoming celebrities.

[14 : 48] And in fact, those are the ones who we're attracted to, because they're the rhetoricians. They're the ones who are able to speak in such an eloquent way. And when someone WhatsApps you a little bit of their sermon, you want to click on it, because they're so entertaining, and they're so attractive to listen to, and they tell us things that make us feel good.

They tell people what they want to get popularity. And so these are the kind of Christian teachers you will come across today, on Facebook, on YouTube.

You sitting at home watching the sermon, on YouTube right now, you're going to see on the right of the screen a whole lot of other suggestions that YouTube gives you as to who to listen to.

Well, a lot of those will be like these teachers I've just described. But none of those teachers that I've just described are authentic teachers of the Gospel. Because here, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, is the standard of what we should be seeking.

Verse 4, have a look at it. Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak, not to please people, but rather God, who examines our hearts.

[16 : 06] That's the standard of the Bible teaching we should be seeking out. Teachers who are not in it for what they can get out of it, but who are willing to make the sacrifices and work hard to tell people about Jesus and not to tell people what they want to hear, but to tell them what they need to hear.

That is the standard for Bible teachers today who are in line with the original apostles. And it's vital, and I say it from the beginning, I've said this passage speaks more to me than anyone else as a preacher, as a teacher.

It's vital for me and others who teach to make sure we are teachers like that. And I'm by no means perfect, and I've got to make sure each and every week that my motives are what they should be. And that's why 1 Thessalonians 2 is going to be a passage I keep open, to keep checking up on myself. But it's also vital for you as a Christian to make sure you are listening to teachers like that. Because I'm under no illusions that I'm the only preacher you listen to. So make sure you are listening to teachers who meet the standard that Paul sets here.

[17 : 26] Which implies also, actually, that you need to know your teachers. Whoever you choose to listen to, you need to know on a fairly personal level to make sure their motives are right.

To make sure they're in it for the right reasons. Notice how frequently in this passage, actually, Paul says, did you notice how often he says, you know, Thessalonians, you know this, don't you, about us.

Look down at the passage. Verse 1, for you yourselves know, he starts. Verse 2, after we were treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, verse 5, we never used flattering speech, as you know, verse 11, as you know, like a father.

So, he constantly says, you guys, you know us personally. You know that what we're saying is true, don't you? He's saying, he's emphasizing here that the Thessalonians needed to have a relationship with him and Silas and Timothy so that they could trust the words that came from their mouths.

Because, fact is, you really can't truly know the motives of someone from behind a screen.

Teachers on the internet can be very convincing, very eloquent, and they can make what they're saying sound very sensible, but are they authentic?

[18 : 58] You'll only truly know if you know them personally. And that's why the way God has set it up in our world for the last 2,000 years is local churches and local pastors who you can get to know and you can talk to and you can ask questions.

And that is how you can know that teachers of the Bible that you listen to are authentic, just as the apostles who wrote the New Testament were authentic, when you know them.

And so do take advantage of that. The fact that Dylan and myself and your Bible study leaders are accessible to know and to talk to, to get to know, to ask questions.

And so that is how Paul says you can know an authentic messenger, you can know the true messengers of the gospel from the ones you shouldn't listen to.

But also then he goes on to say how you can know that the message itself is authentic. That's the second point. And, of course, the ultimate evidence of the authenticity of the gospel that the Thessalonians heard, he says over and over again in this letter, is their own lives and how they changed, what the gospel actually did in the lives of these people when they heard it and accepted it.

[20 : 31] We saw that last week, didn't we? Just the hallmarks of a genuine Christian, the fact that the gospel had taken root and it was doing work in their lives is there.

We can see in 1 verse 3, remember? We recall in the presence of God your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love and your endurance inspired by hope.

Now they would only have that if the gospel they heard was real, if it was truly God's word and it changed them and that's proof that it did because of the Holy Spirit working in it.

And so he reiterates that in our passage in chapter 2 verse 13. He says, this is why we constantly thank God because when you received the word of God that you heard from us you welcomed it not as a human message but as it truly is.

The word of God which also works effectively in you who believe. Not as a human message, not as the words of men but as the word of God and that they accepted it and they recognized it as the word of God despite the persecution they went through.

[21 : 41] Look from verse 14. For you brothers and sisters became imitators of God's churches in Christ Jesus that are in Judea since you also suffered the same things from people of your own country just as they did from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted us.

and so what he's saying here is just as the apostles wouldn't have gone through all they went through in order for the message to come to the Thessalonians so the Thessalonians wouldn't have gone through all they went through unless this message was real and authentic.

But then what he writes here is that to these Thessalonians is that the proof of the message being authentic an authentic word from God isn't just because you were willing to go through suffering but it's that you were suffering at all that proves the message to be true.

You wouldn't be suffering for the message if it wasn't true. That's his point here because the nature of God's truth when it comes into this world is that it will always be opposed by someone.

If it's not opposed by anyone it's not true. The nature of God's truth is that it will always be opposed and it always has ever since the beginning.

[23 : 11] It happened what Paul says here in verse 14. Same things from people of your own country sorry verse 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted us.

So this idea of whenever God's word comes into the earth it gets opposed by some it happened to the prophets. We read earlier from 1 Kings the prophet Micaiah. He was persecuted and he was unpopular because he didn't tell the king what he wanted to hear.

He's never saying anything good about me said the king like a spoiled brat. This messenger this prophet doesn't tell me what I want to hear. Away with him.

Bring the hundreds of prophets who tell me the things I want to hear. Of course they lived it up didn't they? They would have got all the king's favor. They would have eaten and dined with him. Prophet Micaiah ended up in a dungeon.

And of course that happened to Jesus as well didn't it? That's why he was crucified. Because he told people things they didn't want to hear. He says in fact in John 3 to Nicodemus he says these words this is the judgment the light has come into the world but people love darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil for everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it so that his deeds may not be exposed.

[24 : 34] That's what happens when God's true message comes into the world. People will oppose it because it's not what they want to hear. As the Thessalonians lived out and proclaimed this truth they were opposed and as we live out and proclaim this truth we will be opposed to when we share the message of Jesus in the world around us expect it.

And you know what the world around us will say as we share the true message of Jesus? They never say anything good about us. Just like that king said to Micaiah.

And they want us to tell they want us to share the Bible in such a way that it affirms and agrees with what society says.

And often Christians will fold and they will then pick and choose and only say the things that are politically correct. But those of us who want to bring God's true word, what people need to hear into the world, will be opposed for it expect that.

Because the mark of the authentic message is that it will be opposed by the world. And also what that means is another mark of an authentic preacher is that he is preaching things that our society finds offensive.

[25 : 59] He's preaching things like sin and judgment and salvation through Christ alone. But it's people who are willing to listen to preachers like that, preachers who make you feel uncomfortable because they are telling you the full counsel of God.

It's those people who show themselves to be the true people of God because they realize this is not the word of man, it's the word of God. And so Paul's point here as we wrap up.

Paul, the reason we have this chapter in our Bibles, the reason he wrote this to the Thessalonians is he's trying to tell the Thessalonians and us 2,000 years later that we can trust him and we can trust the other apostles and the writers of the New Testament because they are not like the other voices in this world.

And this is not like all the other books in this world that tell you what you want to hear or entertain you or are in it for what they can get out. No. These apostles, these words here in our Bible can be trusted because they are the words of God, they are not the words of men, and they are vital words for you and me in a world full of words and voices, and we wonder where truth can be found, what we can truly trust and truly believe the apostles are proving this is it, what they say.

And so, trust these words, make these words that come from God part of your life, but also choose carefully who you will allow to teach you these words.

[27 : 39] Don't choose your teachers because they're convincing or entertaining or they have a big name and they're celebrities, but choose teachers who, like Paul, are willing to pay the cost that comes with teaching truth and who tell you not what you want to hear, but what you need to hear, what God wants you to hear.

And I hope, and I will endeavor to be a pastor like that for you, and I hope that the result for you will be what it was for the Thessalonians in verse 13, that when you receive the word of God that you hear from us, you welcome it, not as the word of men, but as it truly is, the word of God, which will then work effectively in you who believe.

Let's pray that that would be the case. Lord, we do thank you for the apostles and how you inspired and equipped them in a world of lies to tell us the truth.

Lord, we so desperately need to hear the truth. Help us to be people who seek out truth, even when it's uncomfortable. Help us to be people who don't seek after teachers to tell us what our itching ears want to hear.

But we seek after teachers who are proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and that we will respond to that. And that as we take this word out into the world, help us to endure the opposition that it will elicit, and help us as we teach this word to others to do it not for what we can get out, but because we are obeying you and because we love you and we love the people we speak to.

[29 : 37] Help us to have motives like the apostles did in Jesus' name. Amen. Mobile. Someone knows the gospel.

Help us to score for de■erously goal award trips baseball maker Swift■ chop■ 7