

1 Thessalonians 2:1-4**PREFACE**

The higher-numbered channels on our local over-the-air television options recently made some changes to their programming. Now one (or two; it's hard to tell) stations seem to be taken over by one program: a marathon of "religious" folk begging for money non-stop. ("Just send in \$1,000 for a blessing.") My response to this consists of just two words: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

Such behavior *in* the name of Christ brings only shame *upon* the name of Christ. Paul describes them accurately in Romans 16:18:

For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

Remember the story in Acts 16 about the slave girl with a spirit of divination who was bringing her masters great profit by her fortunetelling. She cried out behind Paul and his men, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation."

Hey, that's a good thing, right? No, Paul wanted no association with such a charlatan—even if she *was* telling the truth in their case. He immediately turned and commanded the spirit to leave her. When it did, this was displeasing to her masters, who suddenly saw their money bags getting lighter, and they had Paul and Silas arrested, beaten, and thrown into jail.

In the Thessalonian letters—and especially in Chapter Two of the first letter, which is before us now—Paul spends no small quantity of ink defending his behavior and his motives in bringing the gospel to Thessalonica. Although the evidence is not explicitly stated for who it was spreading lies about him, Paul clearly feels the need to defend himself. So let's dig into this second chapter of his letter. Let's read our passage.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-4.

v1

For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,

The word "coming (to you)" literally means "entrance"—that is, Paul is not just referring to the Thessalonians being just one more tic mark on an itinerary, but that he and his men entered into their lives.

Even as a young boy I understood the difference between a visiting evangelist and a pastor. The first showed up and, often with distinctive charisma, preached powerfully for one or a few nights, then was gone. The pastor, in contrast, typically had less charisma, was less flashy, but he slogged it out over the long haul. The difference was that the pastor *remained*—He dwelt *with* the people, ministering to the smaller day-to-day aspects of church life, not just the number of people who walked the aisle at the end of a message.

Paul was both: he was a traveling evangelist who, as we have and will continue to see, also invested his life in the church, and was with them—if only by long-distance—over the long haul. He was an eloquent blend of evangelist and pastor.

Their coming was “not in vain.” The word translated “vain” in most versions is

vain, failure^{niv} = *kene* = apparently a primary word; **empty** (literal or figurative) :- empty, (in) vain.

The NIV’s “failure” would be appropriate if Paul had used the Greek *mataios* (fruitless, ineffective), instead of *kene*. These are not synonymous, but one leads to the other: if one’s preaching is empty (*kene*), it will result in ministry failure (*mataios*). For Paul, neither was true; remember how he described the message of his preaching in Chapter One:

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

That was certainly not “empty,” nor did it result in “failure”:

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7.

Vincent’s Word Studies points out that “the Greek for ‘was,’ [was not in vain] expresses rather ‘has been and is,’ implying the permanent and continuing character of his preaching.” Paul was no flash-in-the-pan itinerant evangelist: his message, along with his love for the church was deep, wide, and enduring.

v2

Read v2.

after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi

already suffered = undergo hardship previously

mistreated = *hybrizo* (hoo-brid’-zo) = from <G5196> (hubris); **to exercise violence, i.e. abuse** :- use despitely, reproach, entreat shamefully (spitefully); YLT: “*injuriously treated*”.

Remember, not only was their treatment shameful from a Christian perspective, it was shameful from a *civic* perspective.

Read Acts 16:37.

Then it continued in Thessalonica.

amid much opposition

Read Acts 17:4-5.

opposition^{nasb, niv}, **conflict**^{nkjv, esv}, **contention**^{kjv} = *agoni* (ah-go’-nai) = from <G71> (ago); properly a place of assembly (as if led), i.e. (by implication) a contest (held there); figurative an effort or anxiety :- conflict, contention, fight, race; “*pictures an athlete’s struggle to gain first place in a race or contest*” (Thomas).

This opposition was so vehement that what was ignited in Thessalonica was later exported to their next stop, Berea.

Read Acts 17:13.

But even amidst this opposition, both in Philippi and in Thessalonica, Paul “was bold.” Note how he puts it: “we had the boldness **in our God** to speak...”

boldness = *parresiazomai* = middle from <G3954> (parrhesia); **to be frank in utterance, or confident in spirit and demeanor** :- be (wax) bold, (preach, speak) boldly.

And note the circular aspect of this: Vincent points out that in the original text “there is a slight emphasis on *our* God; their boldness was not mere natural courage, but was inspired by God.” [The NIV captures it with, “with the help of our God.”] Paul had absolute trust in God to empower him for ministry even in the face of such opposition; in turn, God *supplied the power*, the boldness needed. God rewards faith with whatever is necessary for us to endure. Perhaps this was what James was thinking of when he opened his epistle.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

We place our trust in Him, and in turn He gives us what we need to turn that faith into action—*for Him*. As a result, His faithfulness toward us renews and strengthens *our* faith. And on and on...

v3

In this portion of his letter—our second chapter, and especially vv3-8—Paul establishes a rhythm, a structure for his *apologia*. He first states what is *not* true, then answers it with what *is* true.

Verses 3-4

We are not guilty of
error
impurity
deceit
trying to please men

But we
have been called by God for this task
seek to please not men but God, who alone knows our hearts

Verses 5-8

We did not
use flattering (i.e., man-pleasing) speech
have a pretext for greed
seek glory from men

But we
were as gentle among you as a nursing mother is with her child
have a true affection for you; you are dear to us
to the extent that we gave you not just the good news of Christ,
but our very lives

Read v3.

error

error = *planes* (plah'-nays) = feminine of <G4108> (planos) (as abstract); [when active:] **object: fraudulence; subject: a straying from orthodoxy or piety** : - deceit, to deceive, delusion, error; **here, passive, refers more to self-delusion.**

If this had been in the active voice it would have been translated “deceit,” meaning Paul was not guilty of purposely leading the Thessalonians astray with false teaching. Since it is in the passive voice, Paul is saying that he was not guilty of being ignorant of the truth—of being led astray himself—hence, “error.” More than once Paul wrote the churches what he wrote to the Galatians in the familiar verse:

Read Galatians 6:7.

When we are unfamiliar with God’s word, we can easily be led astray by false teachers. Paul is telling them I came to you with truth, not error; I had not been fooled by someone else.

impurity

impurity^{nasb, esv}, **uncleanness**^{kjvs}, **impure motives**^{niv} = *akartharsias* = to be unclean physically or morally.

Nothing is new under the sun. What Eli’s sons were guilty of in the early days of Samuel, when they “lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting” (1 Samuel 2:22)—sexual immorality under the guise of piety—is still prevalent today, as well as the first century. Paul tells them that they brought none of that with them.

deceit

deceit^{nasb, nkjv}, **guile**^{kjv}, **(attempt to) deceive**^{esv}, **(trying to) trick you**^{niv} = *dolo* = from an obsolete primary *dello* (**probably meaning to decoy**; compare <G1185> (deleazo)); a trick (bait), i.e. (figurative) wile : - craft, subtility.

v4

V4 in the NASB—especially the updated version—is a classic example of something translated a little bit *too* literal—to the point of stilted, awkward structure. **Read v4.** It may be accurate, but it requires a few times through to understand it. Here is *The Message* paraphrase:

Be assured that when we speak to you we're not after crowd approval—only God approval. Since we've been put through that battery of tests, you are guaranteed that both we and the Message are free of error, mixed motives, or hidden agendas.
(1 Thessalonians 2:4 *The Message*)

Matthew Henry: Their design was to please God and not men. God is a God of truth, and requires truth in the inward parts; and, if sincerity be wanting, all that we do cannot please God. The gospel of Christ is not accommodated to the fain fancies and lusts of men, to gratify their appetites and passions; but, on the contrary, it was designed for the mortifying of their corrupt affections, and delivering them from the power of fancy, that they might be brought under the power of faith.