

1 Thessalonians 2:9-12**PREFACE**

How far are we willing to go to spread the gospel, whether in active missionary service, or by simply, through our daily behavior, revealing Christ to the unsaved?

The British have a delightfully colorful term for how far the apostle Paul was willing to go during his missionary journeys: to “muck in”—as opposed to “tuck in,” which means to eat food heartily. The Oxford Dictionary defines to “muck in” as “sharing tasks or accommodation without expecting a privileged position.” The term means not being afraid to get your hands dirty (mucky), even if your station or rank might rightly absolve you.

Last week we discussed the subtle difference between using flattery for self-glorification, and becoming something one typically is not, stepping outside one’s normal comfort zone, so as to win souls with the gospel. Here we have a similarly subtle contrast between the right of a missionary or evangelist or preacher/pastor to be supported by those to whom he ministers, and the righteous position of Paul to *refuse* such assistance from the Thessalonians, as well as a number of other churches where he taught (e.g., Corinth).

Let’s begin in the Pentateuch for the basis of this right.

Read Deuteronomy 25:4.

In those days, grain would be broken away from its husk by having an ox walk on it repeatedly (usually around a circle). It would be cruel to force the ox to walk on all the grain, yet to keep him muzzled so he couldn’t eat any of it.

Paul used this commonsense law for the basis of his position to Timothy and the Corinthians that ministers of the gospel are worthy of (financial) support. To the Corinthians he expounds at length [1 Corinthians 9:3-12], but let’s read the more succinct version he wrote to Timothy.

Read 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

The second quotation used by Paul is from the lips of Jesus in the gospel of Luke, as He gave instructions to the seventy-two disciples he was sending out.

Read Luke 10:5-7.

With that established—the biblical basis for supporting a, shall we say, full-time minister—let’s look at our text, beginning at v8.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:8-12.**v9**

The beginning of v9 connects back to v8, where Paul writes, “**we were well-pleased to impart to you** not only the gospel of God but also **our own lives.**”

For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship,

labor = *kop'on* = from <G2875> (kopto); a cut, i.e. (by analogy) **toil (as reducing the strength)**, literal or figurative; by implication pains :- labour, + trouble, weariness; **the normal weariness that comes as the result of hard work.**

hardship^{nasb,niv}, **toil**^{nkjv,esv}, **travail**^{kjv} = *moch'thon* = from the base of <G3425> (*mogis*); toil, i.e. (by implication) sadness :- painfulness, travail; **external difficulties encountered in the process (e.g., obstruction, persecution)**

We can only make an educated guess at the labor to which Paul refers, but it was probably one form or another of his trade: tentmaking. Every Jewish child had to learn a trade, and this was Paul's.

how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you,

Sidebar: In our vernacular, "working night and day" is interpreted as working round-the-clock. But in Paul's time, the Thessalonians would read this as "any part of the night and any part of the day"—that is, he is probably saying that they were up before dawn and worked till after sundown. The point is that he spared himself no toil so as to avoid placing a burden on the people of Thessalonica.

Why did Paul do this in Thessalonica? Why did he purposely take a job to support his ministry, rather than let those to whom he ministered support him? Here are some possibilities:

- The local church could not afford to support the missionaries.
- Seeing that they might be sensitive to this, Paul wanted nothing to distract from the pure message of the gospel, or to dilute it, by asking for financial help in return (**maybe they had been ripped off by someone**).
- There is evidence that some in the community were lazy, and unwilling to pull their own weight, so Paul saw the need to give them a real-life object lesson. We see this evidence near the end of the second letter.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10.

This last would seem to be the most apparent reason Paul did this when he was with them—but what is confusing is that v11 makes it sound as if he just heard about this *after* he left.

Read v11.

If this had been known before he arrived in Thessalonica (thus influencing his decision to work for his keep), one would expect him to write here, "For we hear that some among you are *still* leading an undisciplined life..."

Whatever the reason, Paul thought it was important—to the extent that when his own wages were insufficient, he accepted help from the church in nearby Philippi, rather than seek or accept support from the Thessalonians themselves.

Read Philippians 4:15-16.

Churches, like individuals, have their special gifts. For the Thessalonica church it was actively, energetically spreading the gospel; for the Philippi church it was sending monetary support to the mission field.

v10

There is a sense in which the apostle Paul had it easier than we today. We now live in a world in which there is no line of demarcation between local and universal. It still may be possible—maybe—that in the confines of one's own home we can behave badly and no one will know, but beyond those four walls there is no expectation of privacy, or that what only a few have witnessed will remain only locally known. Today bad behavior witnessed by even just one person can instantly be broadcast to millions on YouTube.

Whether a missionary out in the field of a foreign land, or just someone witnessing to fellow workers during the week, our behavior is constantly being observed—and perhaps recorded and shared. With that being true, in vv10-12 the apostle offers himself and his fellow missionaries as an example for how to conduct one's life—and the reason why—both public and private.

In v5 Paul called upon God as a witness to help prove to the Thessalonians that he did not come to them with a pretext for greed. In v10 he reminds them that God can witness to his righteous behavior in moments not witnessed by them—that is, in private.

Read v10.

The word translated “behaved” is the same Greek word that is translated “proved to be” (or “were”) in v7: *ginomai*, and could be translated, as noted in our discussion of v7, “became.”

In v10 Paul writes that they behaved

devoutly = *hosios* = piously, holily (religious piety)

uprightly = *dikaios* = righteously, justly, equitably (moral conduct)

blamelessly = *amemptos* = faultlessly, unblamably (untainted by fault)

I don't know about you, but to me that's a convicting list. A part of me wants to ask, “Is that even possible?” These guys sound like supermen—or braggarts. He doesn't say it here, but in 2 Corinthians Paul explains why this is not bragging.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12.

It was by God's grace that they could conduct themselves this way. David Guzik writes,

Paul didn't have to say, “Please don't look at my life. Look to Jesus.” Paul wanted people to look to Jesus, but he could also tell them to look at his life, because the power of Jesus was real in his life.

In Thessalonica Paul and his men were living out what he wrote to the Galatians in the fifth chapter of his letter to them. In part,

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

and

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (Galatians 5:13,16-17)

Perhaps there were behaviors that Paul—if he had been giving free rein to the flesh—would have rather been doing. But he loved the Thessalonians, and was there to serve them, not himself. So he was determined to walk by the Spirit, rather than the flesh.

v11

Earlier Paul had used the metaphor of a nursing mother to describe their tenderness in dealing with the church. Now he changes the metaphor from mother to father to describe how they encouraged the Thessalonians to improve their walk with Christ.

Read v11.

Sidebar: The NIV and ESV translations re-order the text and locate the verse breaks different from the other translations, but say the same thing.

A good father would mix comforting encouragement with more authoritative direction and discipline when dealing with his children. So the father metaphor is appropriate when he lists how they were

exhorting = *parakalountes* = admonishing

encouraging = *paramythoumenoi* = to relate near, to comfort

imploring = *martyromenoi* = testify, urge, “appeal to by something sacred”

Paul's use of a form of this word (modified by “dia”) in his second letter to Timothy helps us understand what he is saying to the Thessalonians.

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-2. (I solemnly “charge” you...)

v12

Verse 12 gives us the all-important *reason* why Paul and his men were doing all this—why they had been so careful with their own behavior, and exhorting the church regarding their behavior.

Read v12.

walk, live lives^{niv} = *peripatein* = from <G4012> (peri) and <G3961> (pateo); **to tread all around, i.e. walk at large** (especially as proof of ability); figurative to live, **deport oneself**, follow (as a companion or votary) :- go, be occupied with, walk (about).

I agree with those commentators who suggest that the word translated “worthy” should be “worthily.” That is, Paul is not saying we should behave properly so as to *qualify* for God’s kingdom, but that our lives (walk) should reflect the kingdom of which we are already a part.

worthy, worthily = *axios* = adverb from <G514> (axios); **appropriately** :- **as becometh**, after a godly sort, worthily (-thy).

Most of the unsaved in this world are introduced to Christ by the *behavior* of believers. That is their first clue that there is something—some *One*—out there better than what they know. Our behavior—our witness—can either attract or repel; we can attract them toward His kingdom and glory, or send them running away from His kingdom and glory.

It is up to us to walk by the Spirit, rather than the flesh.