

Studies in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13(d) – Divine Origins – Part 3

Preparatory Study

Read: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13 and 1 Corinthians 16:13

1. Paul and his companions demonstrated qualities best encapsulated in the roles of a mother and a father.
 - a. What are the qualities of a mother that Paul uses to illustrate his work amongst them?
 - b. In 1 Cor 16:13, Paul encourages the Corinthians to 'act like men' (e.g. ESV). In your view, what is the single most important characteristic that a man should have in his character and how would that apply in 1 Thes 2:11.12?
2. The missionaries' love for the Thessalonians resulted in what practical action? How can we apply that to our lives today?
3. In this passage you will find the stated aim of Paul's 'encouraging, comforting and urging'. What is that aim and what do you think it means?

Notes

Paul goes to enormous lengths to ensure that the Thessalonians know that their faith is founded in reality. It can stand any test, any challenge. It is important for us to understand that our faith is rational, reasonable and logical. Our ability to reason is limited so it would be easy to portray the Christian faith as unreasonable. The more our ability to reason grows, so we see the reasonableness of our faith more clearly.

Paul, in the process of making the point that the good news about Jesus comes from none other than God, gives us a valuable insight into how to live in a way that honours God. And so we have a masterful description of how we should treat each other. This isn't just for leaders – if we all follow the patterns set down here the church would be a richer, better place.

We have already seen that Paul knew how to draw on God's resources so he was constantly strengthened in whatever circumstances he found himself. He has made it clear that he and his companions were not using the Thessalonians for their own advantage. They were there for them – not for themselves – and because of that they didn't use flattery, they were not greedy. Their motive was not man's approval but God's.

He has told them what they weren't – now he can give a description of what they were. And this is what we will look at today.

Givers – not takers

I always said to my children that they would know when they have met the right person to marry because that person would not be looking to take from them but to add to them. That is what a good relationship does. Now, of course each person makes a sacrifice in a relationship but the feeling is of support – not of what you can get out of the other person. That is the mark of a genuine person and that is real love. That is the test of a person's heart – do they weigh you down or lift you up? Now, it is possible that our reaction can make the other person seem like a pressure as they try and get near to us for our good – but we should know our own hearts well enough to make that distinction! Do we come in using our introvert to lift up or impose from our extrovert?

Paul is saying: we were there to give; we could have taken from you. We could have claimed maintenance – we could have come in with a certain attitude that was demanding, authoritative – for we came as representatives of God – but we didn't – we were ...

Gentle – like a Nursing Mother

The picture is of a nursing mother, imparting milk to her child and feeling that, not only will I give you milk to sustain you but I will give my very self to you. (cf. Jn 15:13). And I will do it with joy – I am delighted to do it. Not begrudging but selfless.

This is God's attitude to us, and should be ours to each other.

We must not confuse gentle with weak. It is anything but. Gentleness is strength that has been tamed and harnessed and directed for the other person's highest good. We have to learn to distinguish between having the right to do something and the appropriateness of that action. Paul could have been tough and firm – and there were times when he knew how to be just that – but he also knew how to be gentle - so gentle that he uses a lovely picture - that of a nursing mother. The word behind the phrase 'caring for her little children' is an old word meaning 'to keep warm', to 'cherish with tender love,' to 'foster' (Thalpo). The only other place it is used in the NT is Eph 5:29 – and the use of it there is illuminating for it refers to Christ's attitude towards the church.

Think of the tenderness with which a mother cares for her infant, bearing with the child in all the inconveniences that a little one can bring. Think of the dependency of the child in those early stages of growth and the patience and attention to detail required of the mother. But Paul is here thinking primarily of the attitude of heart of the mother to her child. It isn't simply a case of going through the necessary routine but, as Paul put it, 'We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us' (2:8).

Far from being a greedy, licentious flatterer seeking power, prestige and money, desiring to manipulate and abuse, he says we were like a tender, gentle nursing mother, giving around-

the-clock personal, intimate care, providing a haven for people's souls, providing security and peace and affection and kindness and gentleness and mercy and love.

They shared their own lives – this was no means to an end but an end in itself. There is real confusion here in the understanding of church. We are not simply saved so we can get others saved – that is only one of the gifts. The church itself is the gospel in action. The purpose of the gospel is to create genuine communities of believers that honour God by living out what it means to be reconciled to one another.

Is that not how we are to love one another? Is that not what is at the heart of the gospel – a setting free from ourselves so we can truly love? E.g. ‘This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers’ (1 Jn 3:16). Do we carry each other in our hearts like that? Isn’t that what Jesus meant when he said, ‘A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’ (Jn 13:34-35)

Jn 15:9 ‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love’ (Jn 15:9). The Gospel sets us free to love in a deep and selfless way. Walking with God results in a cleansing process that is designed to go ever deeper so the good news is applied more and more into our lives. This is seen most clearly in our ability to deeply and truly love one another. Failure to do so is to fail to have begun to understand the gospel.

Love in action

What was the evidence of this love? Toil and hardship. These are two close synonyms which are often used together (see 2 Thess. 3:8; 2 Cor 11:27). They both mean work which is ‘hard,’ the first in the sense of tiring and the second in the sense of difficult.

In a Jewish setting, there would have been nothing unusual about the missionaries working hard, since every rabbi had a trade. In Thessalonica it would have been more remarkable, since non-Jewish traveling lecturers were often less scrupulous, and the Greeks generally despised manual labor.

Paul is saying – ‘we were there to give – not to get.’ That is why it can be difficult for a Christian to get that balance right. ‘The worker deserves his wages’ as Paul put it when writing to Timothy, but there is a fine line between that and giving the impression that the gospel is for sale – or that those who serve the Lord are there to be taken advantage of. Paul took pride in going to great lengths to avoid any charge of using the gospel for any personal gain – and we do well to follow his example.

No regret

Paul goes on to describe the missionaries' behaviour among them with three words – 'holy, righteous and blameless' or, to put it another way, 'The way in which we behaved towards you who believe was without anything wrong. It was just the way we should have acted.'

It is a wonderful thing to be able to look back and know we have behaved in a way that we need not regret. If we cannot do that then we can know forgiveness – but what we can do today and for the rest of our lives, is to behave in a way that we need not regret. We can ask ourselves, if someone – a friend, child, husband or wife – in five years time, talks about how I am today, how would they see me from that more distant vantage point? Don't do anything today that you might have cause to regret tomorrow. Don't do today what you don't want to be remembered for.

Father

When we think of 'a man' what characteristic comes to mind? 1 Cor 16:13 gives a real insight here. Paul writes, 'Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong' (ESV). The word translated 'act like men' (andrizomai) – actually means 'be courageous'. This verb is not used elsewhere in the New Testament but is common in the Greek Old Testament, almost always with other verbs meaning 'be strong' (e.g. Deut 31:6, 7, 23).

In Corinthians the word is again linked with 'be strong' so we have a good picture of how men are to act. They are to be courageous and strong. The two go together. That is what leadership is about. 'Courage' means a man is a risk taker and 'strength' means he holds in there – he is consistent. Ladies want men to be courageous and strong – that is the essence of leadership.

The greatest leaders the world has ever known and all effective leaders are risk takers because they exhibit strength and courage. And if a man doesn't have strength and courage, he's not a leader. Tribal people would always choose the man with the greatest courage and strength to be their leader. That's maleness at its epitome.

A real man wants to face life with courage. He believes certain things and he's going to stand on his belief. He has been called by God to achieve certain things and he's going to achieve those things. He's going to be courageous whatever the opposition and he's going to make his move. He's going to do what he believes is right and he's going to pay the price. He's going to make the hard decisions and if he makes a bad first one, he'll make a quick better second one and he'll adjust. That's a man...that's a manly man.

When God created 'man' he made him 'in his own imagemale and female he created them' (Gen 1:27). God is so broad in his range of attributes that it took a man and woman to express his image. So, Paul is saying that we can express the best female attributes and the best male attributes in the way we care for one another. There are times to be gentle and there are times to be courageous and strong. As we keep on discovering the fullness of what God has made us to be then we will increasingly use the whole of who we are.