

November 1, 2000 by Steve Brandon



A Successful Ministry (part 3)

1 Thessalonians 2:7-9

1. Bold Speech (verse 2)
2. Pleasing-to-God speech (verses 3-6)
3. Fond Affection (verses 7-12)
- a. His care for them (verse 7).**
- b. His sacrifice to them (verse 8-9)**

Open your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2. I am greatly looking forward again to opening the Scriptures with you this evening. The last time that I had a chance to address you formally was three weeks ago. And again, let me confirm to you my desire to be an instrument through which God will make clear the meaning of His word to us.

We are in a section of Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians in which he is defending his ministry. As you all recall, his ministry had come under attack from his enemies in Thessalonica, and he felt the need to correct their accusations against his ministry. And Paul does so in the first 12 verses of chapter 2.

I have found it interesting, as I have reflected upon these verses of scripture, that Paul's defense is really a slam-dunk case. Paul is clearly in the right and his enemies are clearly in the wrong. If put before a jury, Paul's testimony would stand and the arguments of his accusers would fall. And Paul did nothing more than simply point out the facts of his ministry while among them.

Now, if you remember, we have entitled this section of Scripture, "A Successful Ministry." And I remind you that we have attempted to use the phraseology of Paul himself in coming to arrive at this title. In verse 1, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, and said, "You yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain." In other words, "my ministry was not an exercise in futility, but it bore fruit - it was successful!" It was not vain - it was successful. And within the first 12 verses, Paul gives 3 characteristics of his successful ministry. In previous weeks, we have dealt with each of these.

We looked at Paul's ...

1. Bold Speech (verse 2)

The first characteristic of a successful ministry is bold speech. And we get this from verse 2, when Paul says, "After we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition."

Let me remind you of just one point of application here. I really believe that this was (and is) the key to successful evangelism. The bold church is the evangelistic church. Those who will boldly say what needs to be said are those who will see God bless their ministry. It is those who place it on their hearts to be a bold witness for Jesus Christ, who will pray to God earnestly for opportunities to speak to the glories of His name, and when opportunities come to speak, will trust in the Lord to have the boldness to say what needs to be said.

I had an interesting opportunity last week at work. Some things were being spoken about creation and evolution. I was somewhat on the fringe of the conversation, and at one point, someone said, "Well, Steve, you can't just let it at that, what are you going to say?" At which point, I was able to declare clearly that it is God who created from nothing and He is the one who is sovereign over the universe. More than any programs, more than any methods, more than any evangelistic techniques, I sincerely believe that God will bless the bold church.

And for this reason, I believe that next Saturday (November 11), is a great opportunity for us to work on being bold. We plan on going around this neighborhood near the church to pass out flyers inviting people to come and worship with us. If you can at all come, I would encourage you to come. It will do your heart well to do so.

The second characteristic of a successful ministry is ...

2. Pleasing-to-God speech (verses 3-6)

Last time that we were in 1 Thessalonians, we were in this section here from verse 3 to verse 6. If you remember there were 7 different accusations, which Paul refuted by declaring them to be false. His ministry was ...

1. Not from error (verse 3)
2. Not from impurity (verse 3)
3. Not from deceit (verse 3)
4. Not as pleasing men (verse 4)
5. Not with flattering speech (verse 5)
6. Not with a pretext for greed (verse 5)
7. Not seeking glory from men (verse 6)

But you remember that the only positive characteristic in this whole section has to do with Paul saying that he spoke in such a way as to "please God." First and foremost, this was his desire - to please God in every respect. And Paul did. His speech was pleasing to God.

And again, let me simply point out one application to this point, in which Paul was making. Paul's ministry, first and foremost, was a ministry that sought to please God. As a church, we need to make sure that in all that we do, we need to make it our goal to please God "in all respects." We need to hear of Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians, "We have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him" (2 Cor. 5:9). And this applies to all areas of our church. Though Paul was primarily speaking here (in 1st Thessalonians) about an evangelism which seeks to declare God's truth, rather than bending to the desires of people, this perspective of a ministry which pleases God must apply everywhere.

We need to make sure that our singing time is pleasing to God - that God would look down and accept our "sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips giving thanks." We need to make sure that our praying time is pleasing to God - that God would incline his ear to hear the cries of our heart. We need to make sure that our preaching is pleasing to God - that God would delight in the message proclaimed. We need to make sure that any activity that we would attempt as a church would first run through this grid: "Is it pleasing to God?"

And so, tonight, we come to the third characteristic of a successful ministry. I have called it ...

3. Fond Affection (:7-12)

Now, like last time, I have refined my outline. Last time we were together, I had entitled this section, "Genuine Love." But in an effort to stick as closely with the words of Scripture as possible, I have changed my phraseology to reflect the words of Scripture. For, Paul writes in verse 8, "Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us."

The NIV says, "loved you so much"; KJV uses, "affectionately desirous"; and NKJV says, "affectionately longing". In all of these translations, the sense is the same. In practice, the words, "Genuine Love" and "Fond Affection" essentially mean the same thing. However, it is so much my desire that my exposition of Scripture would be as simple and as clear as possible. And to the greatest extent possible, I will let the words of Scripture dictate my outline and content. So, if you are like me and like to write in your Bible, you might circle, or outline, the key words in this section, which summarize best for us Paul's intent as he wrote. A successful ministry has "boldness". A successful ministry seeks to be "pleasing to God". A successful ministry demonstrates "fond affection" for one another.

And in this section, Paul gives 4 ways in which he demonstrates his "fond affection" for the Thessalonians. Let me mention that these are given for us as well. It wasn't simply "what Paul did." But it is also, "what we ought to do." Some of Paul's argument goes like this: "This is how we behaved, - you go and do likewise."

And in this section, Paul gives 4 ways in which he demonstrates his "fond affection" for the Thessalonians.

- a. His care for them (verse 7)
- b. His sacrifice to them (verses 8-9)
- c. His integrity with them (verses 10)
- d. His instruction of them (verses 11-12)

Paul's fond affection was demonstrated by ...

a. His care for them (verse 7)

1 Thessalonians 2:7

But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing [mother] tenderly cares for her own children.

Paul describes himself here as a nursing mother, who "tenderly cares for her own children." [\[1\]](#) And Paul uses this imagery of the tenderly caring mother to describe his ministry. I hardly need to take time to describe to you all what sort of imagery Paul is bringing up here. You all have seen and know what the nursing mother is like.

A mother takes an infant, who is totally helpless and dependant and denies herself for the good of the child. She sacrifices sleep and nourishment. She provides what goes into the child, out of her own nourishment. She endures what comes out of the child - from both sides!! She cares, cuddles, and protects her child.

Since we recently heard about John Calvin, I feel it appropriate to quote him on this passage. He says, "The mother spares no labor and trouble, shuns no anxiety, is not wearied out by constant attention, and even with cheerfulness of spirit gives her own blood to be sucked."

We were at my sister's house recently when a child was hurt. The child was vainly comforted by my brother-in-law, but my sister comforted her appropriately. What is it about moms?! So should a pastor care for his flock - *with tender care*! And Paul gives for us here specific ways in which he said he was like a mother - *he was gentle*. [\[2\]](#)

Now again, think about the context of this section. Paul was being accused of being a manipulative deceiver. But he simply refutes this by saying that he was gentle. Listen, a gentle leader has a difficult time coming across as a manipulator. - the accusation simply doesn't fit. Think of how a gentle mother cares for her children (and I know this about when our children were little). She picks up the children slowly, being careful to support the head. She puts her children in a soft and warm place. She wipes them with care. She bathes them with care.

And a leader within the church of God is one who demonstrates care and love for his people. Or, as we have said, a leader demonstrates a "fond affection" for his people. And let me point out that it is very important that a spiritual leader be gentle. Paul told Timothy that "the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged." This is the same word. Paul lists this qualification of gentleness as essential for the elder.

1 Timothy 3:3

not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money.

The pastoral office has no room for rough, harsh men. The pastor isn't the burly football coach, who barks out his orders, expecting them to be followed. The pastor doesn't lead the church of God by setting up his own authority based upon fear and intimidation, like Bobby Knight used to do in Indiana. That works on the basketball court, but not in the church of God. That works in the military, but not in the church of God.

This was precisely Paul's point of contrast. Look at the end of verse 6.

1 Thessalonians 2:6

... even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

Paul said that he could have been authoritarian, since he was an apostle. Think about it. Here was the mighty apostle Paul. He could have pulled rank and demanded obedience from others. But, he didn't. He chose the gentle route. He chose the same approach as he did with Philemon. Remember when Onesimus, the run-away slave, was returning to his master, Philemon? Paul could have commanded him to receive him kindly as a brother in Christ, rather than a run-away slave. And yet, do you remember what Paul wrote? "Though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do that which is proper, yet, for love's sake I rather appeal to you." (Phile 1:8-9).

I find it interesting that if the mighty apostle Paul chose the path of gentleness through which to appeal for forgiveness, ought we not do so as well? The Bible doesn't ever describe a godly leader pushing and pressing his authority over people so as to dominate them. You will always find that it is the humble and contrite spirit that God uses.

Moses was the most humble man that walked the earth. David could have killed Saul on numerous occasions, but chose the path of love instead. Jesus, our great example, humbled Himself and took the form of a bond-servant. You remember the way he influenced others! He wore the apron of a slave and washed the feet of the apostles. He came "not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45). He set before us an example that "we should follow in His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

I fear that oftentimes today, religious leaders become religious dictators. And it all breaks down because they don't realize what true godly leadership is about. That is what Paul is telling us here. He is telling us that a leader of God's church must be gentle.

I remember when I was seeking the role of elder (a process, by the way, that took our church over 2 years to complete). I remember, particularly, one man taking me aside and pointing out my lack of gentleness as a potential disqualification in my life. I have been grateful for that counsel, for it really pointed me in a direction which I needed to follow. And from that day forward, I have sought, with God's help, to be a gentle man. It was something which I hadn't noticed before, but I notice it now. See, by nature, I am a rough man. I am one who likes to press ahead. I am driven toward perfection. I have difficulty enduring anything that isn't done quite right. I like to push others to that same goal as well. And yet, I see how often times that isn't the gentle thing to do.

There have been opportunities in my life where I haven't been gentle in my shepherding of people. And I have found that when I shepherd people from a lack of gentleness, there often tends to be a wall erected and a distance created, rather than a fondness and desire for each other. In my harshness, I have hurt others, and actually lost opportunities to be a positive influence in their lives because of it.

I have learned that the best path in which to influence people is by demonstrating a genuine care and concern for their welfare, and not for mine. I have spoken with several of you this past month and affirmed that my desire for you is your good, irrespective of the progress of the church here in Rockford. I remember a man saying once, that the goal of a pastor is to "Get people to be submissive to God's Word, not merely obedient to it." See, there is a big difference between seeing people who obey the scriptures and those who are submissive to the scriptures. The one may be external, but the other is internal. And it is internal obedience, from the heart, which we are seeking to obtain. Romans 6:17 says, "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed."

Gentleness is the path of Spiritual leadership. J. Oswald Sanders, in his book, *Spiritual Leadership*, marked out some qualities of spiritual leaders. Here are a few of his insights: "True leadership is an internal quality of the spirit and requires no external show of force." "A leader should give an impression of sympathetic understanding and friendliness that will put others at ease."

This is what Paul sought to do. He sought to genuinely care for others. He sought to convince them that he loved them. And from that platform of love and care, he had a credibility to speak in such a way that others listened attentively. This is not only the path of Spiritual leadership, however. This is also the path of Christian influence. The way to influence the world for Christ is to demonstrate an authentic love, care and concern for others. People are more inclined to listen to the mouth of the genuinely concerned than from the mouth of the indifferent passerby.

I have seen it work. Convince people of your love for them, and you will have great influence with them. I think, on the flip side, that we are often guilty of speaking without caring. We know what is right far beyond our ability to live what is right. Just last week, I was convicted of this. We had a temporary employee in our department, with whom I felt like I was unnecessarily demanding and short with him. I had an

opportunity to tell him of God's standard of righteousness, and yet, I felt as if my actions betrayed my words, simply because I didn't demonstrate a genuine care and concern for him. May God have mercy upon us. May God give us the grace to love others with His love.

The first way in which Paul demonstrated his "fond affection" for the Thessalonians was in his care for them. The second way was his sacrifice for them (verses 8-9)

b. His sacrifice to them (verses 8-9)

1 Thessalonians 2:8-9

Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

Paul "gave himself totally to them." He gave of himself entirely. Look at the passage more closely ...

1 Thessalonians 2:8

... we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

They gave their lives.

1 Thessalonians 2:9

For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

They worked night and day.

Is this not the picture of Love - Giving up of oneself for another? Serving another tirelessly? Husbands are commanded to "love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." (Eph. 5:25). In 1 Cor. 13, the great love chapter, Love is described as "bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things." In other words, giving of oneself totally and entirely. Christ Jesus, Himself, exhibited this sort of love. The disciple John records for us how Jesus loved His disciples "until the end" (or as some translate it, "to the utmost."). John also records for us how Jesus, in that upper room, donned the apron of a slave and in humility washed the feet of his disciples, giving of himself totally for them.

John Piper tells the story of POW's working on the Burma Railway during WWII:

At the end of each day the tools were collected from the work party. On one occasion a Japanese guard shouted that a shovel was missing and demanded to know which man had taken it. He began to rant and rave, working himself up into a paranoid fury and ordered whoever was guilty to step forward. No one moved. "All die! All die!" he shrieked, cocking and aiming his rifle at the prisoners. At that moment one man stepped forward and the guard clubbed him to death with his rifle while he stood silently to attention. When they returned to the camp, the tools were counted again and no shovel was missing. [\[3\]](#)

And Paul was reminding the Thessalonians of his tremendous love and affection for those in Thessalonica, which gave him reason to sacrifice all for them. Within his making this point, Paul wasn't leaving the motherly picture. Soon, he will pick up the fatherly picture (2:11). And both of these images saturate the passage. Parental love for children is what I gave to you.

I recently heard the following story which illustrates the sacrificial nature of parental love, which Paul wrote about. The story was about a certain Dr. Phil Littleford and his 12 year old son, Mark and two companions who were fishing for salmon in Alaska. They had a small sea plane that they used. And they came to this small, secluded bay, where they were sure that the fish were going to bite. Patrick Morely in The Man in the Mirror writes, ...

They parked their aircraft and waded upstream with where they were ready to catch salmon. Later that afternoon, when they returned to their camp, they were surprised to find their sea-plane high and dry. The tides fluctuated 23 feet in that particular bay and the pontoons rested on a bed of gravel. Since they couldn't fly out till morning, they settled in for the night and enjoyed some of their catch for dinner and slept in the plane. In the morning, the sea-plane was adrift so they promptly cranked the engine and started to take off. Too late, they discovered one of the pontoons had been punctured and was filled with water. The extra weight threw the plane into a circular pattern. Within moments from lift-off, the sea-plane careened into the sea and capsized. Dr. Phil Littleford determined that everyone was alive including his 12 year old son, Mark. He suggested they pray, which the other two men quickly endorsed. No safety equipment could be found on-board. No life vest, no flares, nothing. The plane gurgled and submerged into the darkness of the icy morning sea. Fortunately they all had waders, which they inflated. The frigid Alaskan waters chilled their breath. They all began to swim toward shore, but the rip-tide countered every stroke. The two men along-side Phil and Mark were strong swimmers and they both made shore. One just catching the tip of land before the tides pulled them out toward sea. Their two companions last saw Phil and Mark as a disappearing dot on the horizon, swept arm in arm out to sea. The coast guard reported, "they probably lasted no more than an hour in the freezing waters. Hypothermia would chill the body functions and they would go

to sleep. Mark with the smaller body mass would fall asleep first in his father's arms. Phil could have made the shoreline too, but that would have meant abandoning his son. Their bodies were never found. [\[4\]](#)

It is a sad story. But it demonstrates the strength of parental love. It demonstrates the extent to which a parent will sacrifice and give of one's life for their children. Dr. Littleford could have made it to the shore. But to do so, would mean abandoning his son.

And this is the point Paul was making. He said, "You all know that while I was among you, I was giving greatly of myself. In fact, while I was with you, you know that I sacrificed greatly for you. I was like a mother and a father in my love and care for you." Not only did they impart their lives, but they also worked night and day so as not to be a burden to them.

They supported themselves with the fruit of their own hands. In the time left over, they ministered to the Thessalonians. This, in effect, was really an expression of his great sacrifice of himself for them. Paul told the Corinthians that he had a right to receive support from them. "The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14). And yet, so as not to create a stumbling block (in any way) for the Thessalonians, he chose to work with his own hands. He chose to labor night and day, so as not to be a burden.

And I remind you, again, that as an apostle, he had the right to do so. As 1 Thess. 2:6 says, "even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority."

I can tell you what this is about from experience. I don't need to speak much about this. I feel like I can claim what Paul said, "You all know of our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you." And as I mentioned at the beginning of my sermon tonight, the case against Paul really had no chance of being confirmed. The accusations were totally false. It's like somebody coming up to you and saying, "Steve Brandon? All he wants is your money. He is in it for greed." All of you would see that this accusation is clearly false. All of you would be able to say, "Steve? He works full-time and supports his family and doesn't get a dime from the church."

And I believe that this time has been good for you and it has been good for me. It has been a time in which you all have been able to see my desire to see you all built up in Christ. It has been a time in which you all have been able to see my labor and toil. And let me tell you, it has been labor and toil. I feel a kindred spirit with Paul, who said, "I am in labor until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). He said elsewhere, "I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me" (Col. 1:29). 2 Timothy 2:1-7 speaks of the work and toil a soldier, and athlete and a farmer. For what does he labor? "And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ" (Col. 1:28).

And this is my goal, to present each of you "complete in Christ." And for this, not only have I labored, but I will labor to this end. And we have found it to be a wearying work. We have found it to be a task that has demanded all of us and will continue to demand all of us. And yet, though the work is wearying, we are not weary of the work.

I remember a professor in Seminary, who used to sing, "Weary in the work, but not weary of it." Let me tell you that we are not weary of the work. And the reason why we are not weary of the work is because of what Paul imparted to the Thessalonians: "the gospel of God." (1 Thess 1:8-9).

He mentions it two times in these verses (once in verse 8 and once in verse 9)....

1 Thessalonians 2:8-9

Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

Paul said that when he came to the Thessalonians, he proclaimed to them the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He proclaimed the message that, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow. Though your sins are red like crimson, they will be like wool" (Is. 1:18). "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being [fell] upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed" (Is. 53:5). "He bore our sin" (Is. 53:12). And, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

This is the message - that though we were sinful, and deserving of the wrath of God and eternal punishment in hell, Jesus Christ, "gave Himself for our sins" (Gal. 1:4). As He was stretched out on the cross, He Himself took the punishment that we deserved. And as Jesus said, "Repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations" (Luke 24:47). That is what Paul did. He proclaimed "Repentance for forgiveness." You remember, how in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, he recounted how the Thessalonians, "turned to God from idols." This has always been the condition for forgiveness: Repentance.

This past week, we have had an exposition conference in DeKalb (at Kishwaukee Bible Church). We devoted this conference to the study of the prophet Malachi. We spent 2 ½ hours on Friday night, and four hours on Saturday morning simply reading and discussing Malachi. It was a great time. I look forward to the day when we can do an exposition conference here in Rockford!

The message is summed up by this phrase: "Return to Me, and I will return to you" (Mal. 3:7). Malachi wrote to a religious people. Malachi wrote to a people, however, who gave only half-hearted homage to God. They didn't see their sin. They didn't understand the righteousness of God. He said to them, "Return to Me, and I will return to you" (Mal. 3:7).

And I would press you tonight, beloved. Is your worship half-hearted? Do you continually see your sin and continue to lay it on the cross of Jesus Christ? Do you believe the gospel? If not, I would beg you to be reconciled to God. If so, I would tell you to glory in the cross of Christ.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 1, 2000 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] As a footnote, many of you will recognize that the word "mother" is in italics, which means that the word isn't found in the original text. The King James correctly translates this, "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children." However, most modern translations include the word mother. And I believe that they have correctly added this word, especially due to the last words of this verse - "her own children." And these words are emphatic in the text. Who has children, but a mother. The picture isn't of a surrogate nurse, but of a motherly nurse.

[2] As a footnote, let me say a few things about this translation. Most modern translations are correct in translating this word "gentle." However, many manuscripts have the letter, "n" in front of this word in the greek, which would be translated, "babes." The reason for this is because the word just before it ended in "n." We can get a little flavor of what happened if we translate verse 7 like this. "But we had been gentle among you." In fact, these two sentences are virtually the same. So, although you might see in your margin that another manuscript reads, "babes," the context here is Paul talking about himself as a mother. And the translation of "gentle" fits much better with the context.

[3] cf. Heb. 12:2. p. 256, Future Grace

[4]