

1 Thessalonians 2

Last week we talked about everything beginning with God. He pursues us. He calls prompts others to share the good news of Jesus with us. They share that message more effectively by sharing that message through the way they live and by sharing the message verbally. Then He calls us to carry that process forward by modeling and sharing our faith, as prompted, with others.

Paul said, we need to be like the Thessalonians who followed those who follow Christ. He said to them, we demonstrated that we were from God and that you could trust us.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-6, *“For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with **words** but also with power, with the **Holy Spirit** and deep conviction. **You know how we lived among you** for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord.”*

Paul goes on to teach them a sort of verification process that followers need to be aware of. He outlines the **Signs of a Trustworthy Leader or Ministry**.

He says those worthy of being followed will have words , of course, supported by scripture, their witness will be accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit who brings deep conviction, and they will live life in community where accountability provides discerning protection.

These are **three major resources**. [1] The Word. [2] The Holy Spirit. And [3] the Body of Christ; the church.

I would suggest that God intends for us to verify trustworthiness by using **all** three of these. If there is **any one** of these **lacking in a ministry, while the** other two are present, it leaves the trustworthiness of that leader or ministry in question. Those following them are vulnerable to deception.

As I think back over the last few decades, I can't help but remember national scandals where **sincere Christians** got taken to the cleaners by unscrupulous leaders. In some cases, it cost them their marriages or their life savings. In extreme cases like Jim Jones, Marshall Applewhite and David Koresh, it cost people their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

Jesus, Peter, John and Paul repeatedly warn us about false prophets.

They knew how prevalent this issue was; not only in Judaism but especially in this new faith called Christianity.

So beware of those who focus on one or two of these at the expense of the other. The Word, the Spirit and the Church are all vital.

In the early days of Christianity, the power of God was endorsing that new little movement. Others, with less than pure intentions, were trying to take advantage of that success for their own personal gain. Be warned! Test them.

Jesus in writing to the church of Ephesus had this to say in **Revelation 2:2**,

“I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false.”

From the onset, believers were able to test the claims of “*Christian leaders.*”

Paul understood this fact; that there were things that distinguished true apostles from fake ones. He said that much to the Corinthians in in **2 Corinthians 12:12**,

*“I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, **including** signs, wonders and miracles.”*

The marks of a true apostle – which included special gifting. It was especially important in those early years before there was a New Testament to safeguard what was true.

God was building His church upon revealed truth that was established by New Testament prophets and the Apostles. It was important that nothing got infused into that movement or the body of truth that would guide it

Ephesians 2:19-20, *“You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”*

True apostles and prophets had to be distinguishable to the early church.

Anyone can look back now and know that the cult leaders in these last few decades and see that they were not of God. But the difficulty is that the signs of false prophets are far more subtle in the beginning than at the end.

Jones, Applegate and Koresh are three of the most radical examples of cult leaders. Usually, the consequences are less sensational.

Often, it involves some kind of sexual practice that breaks up families and marriages or it is simply some kind of financial rip off.

When Laurie and I lived in New Hampshire, I worked with a couple of ex-pastors who had started a house church and were planning to buy land in Maine and start a commune. They had us over to their house to meet their small group. There were several couples there and they were nice enough. But something was off, we saw it off from the get-go.

The word wasn't absolute, and lifestyles didn't match up with words. I worked with these guys, the people they were at work, were not the people they were at that gathering. I told them we didn't feel that God was leading us in that direction. Later on, the families in that group all met with some very bad experiences. And the leaders, eventually showed their true colors. It wasn't pretty. I can't say in this public setting what followed.

And frankly, that wasn't my only encounter with a Christian cult, I had another run into another one too as I wandered away from church. That group had the same two issues, and it ended the same way for several families in it.

Look, folks, I know we don't want to be critical or judgmental of people and we want to give people a fair shake, **but we do need to be discerning.**

In our text today, Paul broadens his powerful lesson by presenting **objective criteria** for **determining the trustworthiness of leaders and ministries.**

This comes about as Paul defends himself against false accusations that have been waged against him. In **1 Thessalonians 2** we are given good insight on what characterizes godly ministry. Paul starts by saying...

*“You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without **results**. We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but **with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.**”*

The 1st characteristic of a Trustworthy Leader or Ministry is...

I. They Face Opposition Courageously

Paul was opposed by certain people vs 1-2. Of course, almost anybody that's doing anything faces a certain amount of opposition.

Paul certainly had some who readily defended Him and his team. But there were others too who had all kinds of negative things to say about him.

Jesus said in **Luke 6:22-23**, *“Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. 23 “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated **the prophets.**”*

It is rather amazing how people who know their bibles and claim to be God followers can be so hateful and say such mean stuff to God's servants.

Surprisingly enough Jesus made this astonishing statement in...

John 16:2, *“They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.”*

Jesus says that is just how it works. **And on the other hand**, He warns, that if all you get is praise, you might be in the wrong camp! Look at ...

Luke 6:26, *“Woe to you when **everyone** speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the **false prophets.**”*

You can do all the right things but expect opposition. If you aren't getting a lot of opposition, reassess.

I find it absolutely impossible to be obedient to God and please everybody at the same time. Regardless of how sure I am of God's leading, I'm going to step on someone's toes.

Some people humble themselves and get right with God. Others attack the messenger head on. And then others, go after the sheep, creating as much dissention as they can in an effort to discredit the messenger. Amazing – but that is just how it works – Jesus says!

Good leaders and ministries ruthlessly scrutinize their motives and work very hard at operating out of godly principles. **but that doesn't insure the absence of opposition.**

Paul faced fierce opposition at Philippi. It would have been very easy to quit the ministry in Philippi long before he arrived in Thessalonica.

But Paul is the real deal. His response: he gets up, wipes the dust off and goes to Thessalonica and risks the same thing all over again.

He was steadfast in his commitment to fulfill his calling in spite of all the opposition. That marks a trustworthy leader or ministry.

They are so convinced of their calling that they don't give up. They face opposition courageously.

1 Thessalonians 2:2, "...with the help of our God **we dared** to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition."

I have known people who have gone from church to church stirring up strife and claiming it as an evidence of their **superior spirituality**.

If strife follows you wherever you go, there's probably something radically wrong. Be very careful! Especially when reading these words.

Proverbs 6:16-19, "There are six things the LORD **hates**, seven that are **detestable** to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and **a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.**"

If we don't like what is going on, here, or there, or over there. If one place after the other is wrong, wrong, wrong – be careful! Better maybe to walk away and assess yourself. **Just so you know** – there isn't something going on behind the scenes that prompted this lesson. It is just a subject of this text.

The 2nd characteristic of a Trustworthy Leader or Ministry is...

II. They Have Pure Motives

1 Thessalonians 2:3-6, "For **the appeal** we make does not spring from **error or impure motives**, nor are we trying to **trick you**. 4 On the contrary, we speak as those **approved** by God to be **entrusted** with the gospel. **We are not trying to please people but God**, who **tests our hearts**. 5 You know we **never used flattery**, nor did we put on a **mask to cover up** greed—God is our witness. 6 We were **not looking for praise** from people, not from you or anyone else, **even though as apostles** of Christ we could have asserted our authority."

Paul said we weren't playing some kind of game of deception. We weren't presenting ourselves as one thing while being something altogether different. We weren't pretending to have one goal while having **some hidden agenda**.

Paul deals with this issue on three levels.

First, he says his purpose or goal was to please God not people.

That's very significant. I know of congregations that have lost sight of pleasing God. The few with power and influence hand pick pastors who'll work to please them.

But **woe to any congregation** who finds a spiritual leader who isn't seeking to please God. **Pity the congregation** who finds a leader whose primary goal is customer relations. That man will compromise what's important along the way to save his own skin.

*How can I tell the difference between someone who seeks to please God and someone who seeks to please men? **Hear me carefully.***

The person who seeks to please men makes decisions that meet with the least resistance and what is popular with the people, especially the powerful people. **In contrast**, the person who seeks to please God makes decisions based **upon principle—especially principles found in the word of God.**

Second, says we never used flattery or put on a masks.

One evidence that a person has a hidden agenda **is flattery**. *What's the difference between flattery and a complement?*

The key difference **is sincerity**. *Do I really mean what I'm saying or am I actually saying something I don't really believe?*

We all need to be encouraging one another – that's biblical! We should look for characteristics in each other that we can sincerely compliment. But flattery goes beyond what's true in order to manipulate—to gain favor. When you see flattery going on, it's a red flag.

That said, I always want to have people close enough to me that if I get out of touch by sweet words – they've got permission to not sugar coat things.

Third, Paul says we weren't looking for praise from people

Now this seems to sound like a little bit of the two previous ideas combined pleasing people to get flattery, but it is rather distinct.

Paul says he wasn't motivated to please people or seeking their praise.

When a leader's need for people's affirmation is at an unhealthy level it makes them vulnerable to flattery. And it's amazing how a manipulator can smell that weakness out.

We all want to be **respected and appreciated**. That is natural. But that basic need for affirmation must come out of a close **relationship with God** and then out of **healthy human relationships**.

The third characteristic of a Trustworthy Leader or Ministry is...

III. They are Humble, Loving and Nurturing.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, "*Instead, we were **like young children** among you. Just **as a nursing mother** cares for her children, **8** so we **cared for you**. Because **we loved you so much**, we were **delighted to share** with you not only the gospel of God but **our lives as well**."*

He said we could have asserted our authority as apostles and demanded you make the sacrifice for us. But instead we were humble like children and like a nursing mother we cared for you.

We delighted in sharing the gospel with you but also we gave you our very lives as well. We loved you so much we gladly made the sacrifices for you.

We had the joy a few weeks ago to meet our new grandson Salem. Watching how Katie and Nate cared for him was so awesome.

I am always amazed at the contrast of a mom's pain while giving birth to a child and the immediate change in their countenance when they draw that baby close to their hearts. Love overcomes pain.

Paul said I became like a nursing mother to you—full of tenderness and gentleness and love toward you.

Paul wasn't complaining about the pain he went through in giving them life through the gospel. He was simply pointing to it as evidence of the sincerity of his love toward them. The pain was worth it to have you – he's saying!!

The fourth characteristic of a Trustworthy Leader or Ministry is...

IV. They Work Hard and Live Right

1 Thessalonians 2:9-10, “Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our **toil and hardship**; we **worked night and day** in order **not to be a burden** to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.” You are witnesses, and so is God, of how **holy, righteous and blameless** we were among you who believed. **For you know** that we **dealt with** each of you **as a father deals** with his own children, **encouraging, comforting and urging** you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”

Hard work and personal sacrifice are characteristics of godly ministry that is usually absent in the counterfeit. The charlatan may work hard for awhile to get what he wants—but it will not characterize his life and personal sacrifice is certainly not in his plans.

Paul uses that word **kopon** again here that he used in week one when complimenting their labor of love.

Again, this word emphasizes the **weariness and pain experienced** in the work he had done on their behalf.

In other words, Paul and his companions were working very hard, “*night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.*”

As missionaries, they had every right to be supported and provided for as they preached the gospel. This was not something they had to do but rather chose to do.

Paul says, examine our lives—look at the way we lived. We lived upright, devoted lives that were above reproach. There were no hidden scandals. They worked hard and lived right. People could safely follow him.

Our lives reflect what we really believe. If you say I believe in giving a portion of all I have back to the Lord but only give sporadically—I’m deceiving myself.

If I say I believe in servanthood but I never serve, who am I fooling? I’m just fooling myself. I’m not fooling God and I’m probably not fooling people either. What we do reflects what we really believe and what we really are.

So Paul says, take a look. I think you will find a consistency between what I am saying and what I am doing.

The fifth characteristic of a Trustworthy Leader or Ministry is...

V. They Encourage and Urgingly Guide

1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, “For you know that we **dealt with** each of you **as a father deals** with his own children, **12 encouraging, comforting and urging** you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”

Here Paul likens himself to a father. Earlier he likened himself to a nurturing mother. Now he adds the paternal side of the relationship.

In that culture the wife did most of the nurturing and the husband was responsible for the training.

Like a good father **Paul encouraged them** in the face of their trials and tribulation. **He urged** them toward righteousness, to continue their walk with God—to live lives worthy of God’s kingdom and glory.

Now lest we lose sight of the point—what was Paul’s message about?

It was about serving God. It wasn’t about how to multiply your dollars or how to gain success in a competitive world.

The thrust of the message is a strong indicator of what the messenger is really about. **It is tender. It is encouraging. But it is designed toward righteousness.**

It is not an ear tickling message but **a God pleasing message.**

And quickly, the sixth *characteristic of a Trustworthy Leader or Ministry is...*

VI. They Preach the Word

1 Thessalonians 2:13, “And we also thank God continually because, when you received **the word of God**, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, **the word of God**, which is indeed at work in you who believe.”

We talked about this last week, so I won’t go into great detail here.

But the signs of a trustworthy ministry and leader is that they preach and teach the Word.

There are lots and lots of things we could talk about when we come together.

But if the word of God does not remain central then the whole endeavor will drift off course.

It is easy for people to come together (not around God's word) but simply around social activity. Relationships are very important. But when a group of people are no longer hungry to hear what God has to say, they are in trouble of becoming nothing more than a social club.

Once a focus on the word is lost, a church is like a ship without a sail-- just drifting in the vast ocean of humanism.

Paul compliments these people for their regard for the word. He did that in chapter 1 and he does here as well. **Why?** Because it is extremely important.

For the word to be effectual **two things must happen.**

On the part of the preacher he must submit himself to God and speak as an oracle of God. **On the part of the hearer** he should verify it is the word and then respond in faith.

How about you today? Are you ready to respond to the word of God this morning? Has He used it to speak to your heart?

It begins with God as we saw last week. And that process of finding joy and a life of hopelessness transformed into a life of joy is a continuing work of God in your life as you respond to His word.

1 Thessalonians 2:13, *“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, **which is indeed at work in you who believe.**”*

The word is not effectual because once upon a time you believed and became a Christian. It is effectual as you continue in your belief. The benefit you receive from it depends upon how you receive it. Believing that God has spoken to you through it and then applying it accordingly—that is how the work of transformation takes place in you. **Let's Respond to Him in Pray!**