

THE PROFILE OF A GODLY LEADER

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Let's Begin

The following scenario could be repeated again and again. An influential leader in a community or a popular football quarterback turns to faith in Christ. He is immediately rushed before large gatherings to give his testimony. If he possesses natural gifts for public speaking, we coordinate meetings and arrange for him to teach. In other words, he becomes a Christian leader.

Is it wrong to utilize the new-found faith of young believers? Of course not. Is it wise to thrust young believers into positions of leadership without a visible pattern of spiritual maturity? The answer to this question is as obvious as the answer to the first question. Regardless of any latent, natural talents visible in believers, the Christian life must be sufficiently developed before one is placed in a leadership capacity. Satan will powerfully employ every strategy available to him to bring down the young believer.

Why did Paul not take a more prominent role in his early days of faith after his conversion (Acts 9)? Indeed were we to catalog all he could have added to the early persecuted church, surely many lives could have been saved both physically and eternally! However, God placed Paul in virtual seclusion until he was spiritually ready to serve Him (Gal. 1). 1 Thessalonians 2 assists us in understanding the profile of a godly Christian leader.

As we begin our study of chapter 2, let's follow the outline below:

- I. A Leader's Character Before the People (vv. 1-12)**
- II. A Leader's Communication with the People (vv. 13-16)**
- III. A Leader's Challenges Beyond the People (vv. 17-20)**

I. A Leader's Character Before the People (vv. 1-12)

Paul's counsel in chapter two resembles a good manual for Christian leaders. He begins, "For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ" (vv. 1-6). Paul tells us what it takes to be an effective, godly, leader. And, his profile looks nothing like what one often finds today. An exemplar leader need not be handsome, accomplished, or at the top of the societal ladder. Instead, Paul specifically focuses on character.

Indeed moral integrity and inward strength stand at the top of Paul's profile of a great leader. He offers three marks which demonstrate strong character.

First, a leader's character must possess a strong sense of *mission* (vv. 1-2). Every leader desires his contribution to be helpful and successful. Or, in Paul's words, "not in vain." Leaders want fruitful ministry, not failing ministry. Hence, strong character inevitably bears this overwhelming sense of mission. Our calling, our "record is on high."

In addition, a leader's sense of mission remains strong in the face of *trial* as well as *triumph*. Paul's ministry was difficult. He had no air-conditioned office to study, soft-cushioned chair in which to relax as Apostle to the



Reflection Connection

Reflect for a moment on which develops your spiritual life more, trials you face or triumphs you receive. Be prepared to expound to the entire study group.

Gentiles, or cell phone to “text” an instant answer to an inquiring convert. The Apostle simply says, “we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi...” Being an apostle was a rugged ministry, a ministry of suffering. And, the trials any believer faces are designed by God with one singular purpose—to develop our character. Trials develop and strengthen the Christian leader.

Nonetheless, Paul assured, we were “bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.” When leaders faithfully obey, remaining bold even in the face of difficulty, triumph inevitably descends from heaven. God sends our much needed rain for a great harvest. If all leaders had to expect was trial without triumph, discouragement would remain as a permanent fog; hope would vanish. God gives good success to His leaders as they develop.

Second, a leader’s character must possess a pure sense of *motive* (vv. 3-6). Paul has been attacked. Not for one particular message, mind you. It was “our preaching” that was assaulted. The entire message he proclaimed was under siege.

Three specific charges were raised against him. First, Paul’s critics accused him of being wrong in *message* (v. 4). Paul insists the apostles “were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak.” God chose them to deposit the message of His Son. The Thessalonians tested the Apostle’s calling. Understand: God will always test you before He trusts you. So should the church test its would-be leaders before it trusts them to lead.

Second, Paul’s critics accused him of being wrong in *motive* (vv. 3a, 5). The apostolic message was not birthed to please men, but God. Paul understood this truth more than anyone. Indeed some of them were flinging accusations of insincerity and deceit toward the Apostle. However, no one can know the heart of another. Whenever someone challenges our motives, they are stepping into an arena where only the Holy Spirit may operate. We may warn; we may exhort; we may initiate introspection. But we may never accuse. God and God alone must judge (cp. Matt. 7:1).

A leader must test His motives. Are his motives in line with God’s word? Do his motives bear “covetousness” or the righteousness of God?

Finally, Paul’s critics accused him of being wrong in *method* (vv. 5-12). Paul refused to offer “flattering words” to present the Gospel. Why? Because the flesh craves flattery. Someone well said flattery is like cologne—meant to be smelled but not swallowed. Paul told them the hard truth. They were lost sinners in need of the one and only Savior Who could save them—Jesus Christ. No sick person wants a doctor to offer them flattery. And, surely no dying person wants someone to give them compliments. Ultimately, true Gospel preaching is giving what all people need, not what any flesh wants.

In addition, Paul goes on to reiterate how, even when preaching the hard truth of the Gospel, he remained gentle among them. He writes, “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us” (vv. 7-8). Paul’s conduct before the people stands as a permanent model for effective leaders. He employs the use of three metaphors to illustrate a godly leader’s character.



First, a leader is like a *mother* (vv. 7-8). The picture is of a nursing mother with her child. The key term here is “cherisheth.” It means “to warm” (cp. Eph. 5:29). A leader exhibits warm relationships with those he leads.

Second, a leader is like a *laborer* (vv. 9-10). Paul recalls their “labouring night and day” among the people, preaching the Gospel to any and all. The Thessalonians were witnesses.

Third, a leader is like a *father* (vv. 11-12). When a leader stands with the Bible in his hand, he “exhorts,” “comforts,” and “charges” every person “as a father *doth* his children.” By this image, Paul does not have in mind to patronize nor to condescend. Any preacher, pastor, or other leader has feet of clay like all other men. However, when one speaks from the Word of God, one is speaking with the *authority* of God. And, since God is our heavenly Father, the faithful leader may exhort, comfort, and charge similarly as a father to his children.

A leader exhibits warm relationships with those he leads.

II. A Leader’s Communication with the People (vv. 13-16)

Not only is a leader’s character before the people significant in determining the profile of a godly, effective leader, but a leader’s ability to communicate with the people is also significant. Paul writes, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (v. 13).

Two types of hearers exist to which the leader must communicate. The first type is the *receiver*. Paul said when he preached, some received his message, “...not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.” They welcomed the Word into their lives. They believed it with anticipation but humbly and soberly allowed the Word to correct their lives. And because they received the Word, it “effectually” worked in their hearts (cp. Acts 17:11; James 1:21).

The second type of hearer is the *rejecter* (vv. 14-16). Paul pulls no punches when he speaks of his own Jewish people (cp. Rom. 9:1-2). They had become an exclusive, bigoted nation. Why? Because they rejected the Word of God. And, what was true of them as a nation is particularly true of a life that rejects God (cp. 1 Cor. 2:14). Our problem today is not so much an absence of the Word of God but no spiritual receptivity to the Word of God.

Paul takes his brush and strokes a picture of those who reject the Word of God. First, their lives are characterized by *persecution*. All faithful believers experience persecution. However, Paul is concerned here is not with those persecuted but the ones doing the persecution. He writes, “...ye also have suffered like things of

Reflection Connection

As you think about either receiving God’s Word or rejecting God’s Word, which characterizes your response?



your own countrymen, even as they *have* of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved..." (vv. 14-16).

Persecution is not something new. In every era, the faithful people of God have received persecution from those who reject God's Word. Indeed nothing brings out more hostility of the human heart than preaching the Word of God.

Persecution is not something new.

Next, their lives are characterized by *obstruction*. They "forbid" speaking without their approval. Those who reject God's Word seek to obstruct those who preach God's Word. Surely one of the most horrific sins is to inhibit another person from hearing the Word of truth.

Third, those who reject God's Word are characterized by *retribution*. A time comes when those who reject God's truth may proceed no further (cp. Gen. 15:16; Dan. 8:23; 9:24; Matt. 23:32). And, when the time comes, God will make a visible, devastating appearance on those who spurn His Word.

III. A Leader's Challenges Beyond the People (vv. 17-20)

A leader's role takes him beyond the walls of his church. He comforts, corrects, and challenges the flock over whom God has placed him to lead. However, no leader is protected from many influences beyond dealing directly with the people. In fact, Paul had to deal with the Thessalonians from a distance. He writes, "But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire" (v. 17).

Paul's *absence* from the Thessalonians created unique circumstances he must address. And, his enemies undoubtedly took advantage of his absence. If Paul really cared for the church, his critics supposed, why then would he not come and see them in person? Paul's response is straight from the heart.

First, it is an *emotional* response. Paul employed emotionally-charged language "taken from you." The Greek term behind the phrase literally means "orphaned." No greater sense of anguish and loneliness can be imagined. After all, what is more heart-rending than a child being taken from his or her parents? Indeed some translations use even a stronger term which suggests "torn from you." Picture in your mind's eye a young child being forced from the arms of a loving parent.

Second, it was a *physical* response. Note the Apostle says, "not in heart." By this Paul means that while he may not have been physically present with the Thessalonians, his heart was nonetheless with them. For Paul, it was not a matter of, "out of sight, out of mind"; far from it. Even though a leader cannot be physically present for each and every event, his effectiveness as a leader should be present throughout the event.



Reflection Connection

How does the absence of your pastor at a special event affect the success of the event? This may be a good time to invite your Pastor to the group to talk about this question.

Even more challenging to effectiveness than a leader's absence is the *hindrance* Satan creates. Paul writes, "Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us" (v. 18). Talk like this is foreign to most Christians. Few tell their boss upon arriving late for work, "Satan hindered me!" The fact is, however, we are not as aware of the reality and activity of the devil as we should be.

The Greek word translated "hindered" is a military term, often used when enemies cut up a road, making it impossible to pursue them. Satan is the great enemy of the believer, always cutting up our pathway as we follow the Lord Jesus.

Satan is a hinderer by design. He possesses the power to hinder and frustrate the work of God's people. How does he operate? Sometimes he uses physical assaults (2 Cor. 12:7). At other times he flings physical difficulties like imprisonment, storms, and conflicts. And, very often the devil uses human instruments (cp. Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Furthermore, Satan's hindering work results in his ultimate defeat. No one is all-powerful but God Himself. Hence, Satan's power may be great, but it is no match for our Lord. God's purpose can never be wrecked. The devil may hinder for a while. But when God gets ready to act, Satan must surrender. In fact, Satan's defeat is assured (cp. Rom. 16:20).

Not only did Paul's *absence* from the Thessalonians pose challenges to his leadership, but also Satan's activities were brought against him. In the end, however, the Lord's *presence* offsets any hindrance Satan's ploys might bring. Paul writes, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy" (vv. 19-20).

As we mentioned in the introduction, each chapter in 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to the Second Coming of Christ. The phrase "at his coming" is captured by the Greek word, "*parousia*." It literally means "to be alongside" or, if you will, "presence." The Second Coming of Jesus Christ is a second coming of His *presence*.

Nothing should more motivate the godly leader than knowing the soon return of Jesus Christ. Our world is not looking for a King but every believer should be. Indeed, we should love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8), look for His appearing (Heb. 9:28), and live for His appearing (1 John 3:3).

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul insists that even in the face of great suffering, "we were bold" in preaching the Gospel (v. 2). The term translated "we were bold" is the Greek term *parrhesiazomai*, which means "to be frank in utterance, or confident in spirit and demeanor." At times the believer is to be gentle in his or her correction. At other times, Christians are called upon to be frank in speaking the truth. Paul was bold in both ways and encouraged all believers to be the same.

Wrap Up

In this study, we have profiled the godly leader. The challenges he faces are formidable. It begins with godly character. No leader can be called a successful leader who lacks the character of the Lord Jesus. No matter how many people he leads, he fails if he does not develop in Christian character. In addition, his communication with the people he leads is vitally important. In the end, however, the mark of a great leader is what happens when he is absent. Did he lead the people to be successful even in his absence? The leader's ultimate motivation is the Lord's return. It should also be ours.

