

Study 2: Gentle Witness

Introduction

Have you ever had a mentor or close friend help you through a difficult, emotional issue, so much so that afterwards you felt the issue would not have been resolved as well without their assistance? What about their manner, motives, or methods assisted you in that difficult time? Chances are that they connected with you on a deep level that enabled you to see the problem from a different perspective or gain a level of clarity that would not have been possible otherwise.

Today's study focuses on Paul's example of being a gentle witness to early Christian converts. Rather than approaching his ministry as an academic exercise, Paul approached it with earnest effort and treating the converts like they were family, which enabled him to come alongside the converts without being a burden on them or creating mistrust. Through this example, Paul emulated Jesus' ministry. Paul describes his approach in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 because at the time Judaizers claimed he was trying to achieve personal gain through his ministry. By describing his approach in this chapter, we can better understand an ideal approach for telling others about the Gospel and spreading the good Word in an effective and un-manipulative way.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

Discussion

1. Despite being persecuted and suffering, Paul persevered in his ministry work. The reference to Philippi refers to events in Acts 16:19-39. In these verses, Paul was imprisoned and endured much suffering, yet was able to give praise to God through song and God ultimately freed him and converted his captors. Ministering to others in the name of Jesus is not an easy road, yet Paul showed boldness, perseverance, and earnest effort despite feeling persecuted and enduring pain. **What are some priorities Paul lays out here and in Acts 16 if we intend to effectively minister to others under possible persecution or suffering?**

2. In verses 3-5 Paul asserts that the appeal of his ministry did not derive from error, impurity, deception, greed, to please man, or through flattering words. **What do you think this kind of ministry looks like in practice? Have you ministered to others in this way or been ministered in this way? Please share what it looked like?**
3. Paul and his team never ministered for personal gain or selfish desires. They sought to be real, authentic, and they focused on their relationship with God. **In what ways can we ensure our motives are pure and authentic when we engage in ministry?**

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8

⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

Discussion

4. At any time and in any culture, a nursing mother is recognized as an example of self-sacrifice, unconditional love, and nurturing care. A nursing mother and a newborn infant develop a strong emotional connection of love. This is the lesson Paul has for Christ's followers engaging in spreading the gospel: do it with an emotional connection of love and with tenderness. **With this guidance in mind, how do you think we should discern whether someone is ready to hear the Gospel or not? How should we approach someone who might be reluctant to hear the Gospel?**
5. Paul's example is one without guile, showing love and being selfless towards converts. Being a witness to a new convert carries a great deal of responsibility since the example set by the witness might be the first and lasting impression that the convert has of Christ's love and mercy. **What are some practical ways a gentle and humble witness could approach a new convert with the care and compassion that a mother approaches an infant?**
6. In verse 8, Paul states that because the new converts had become very dear to him he wanted to share not only the Gospel, but also our own selves. **Do you think it is important to share your own story with a new convert? Why or why not?**

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12

⁹ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Discussion

7. Whereas verses 7-8 emphasize Paul's witnessing like a self-sacrificing mother, in verses 9-12 Paul equates his missionary work with the efforts of a loving, caring father to his children. A father is also another example of self-sacrifice, love, and care, but in a different way than a mother. **What are some practical ways that ministering and spreading the gospel is similar to a father's love?**
8. Each verse in 9-12 emphasizes certain positive attributes of Paul's team. **What were some of these attributes?**

Connection to the Gospel

There are many lessons to be learned from 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Two key lessons stand out that are worth emphasizing: 1) An effective witness avoids worldly techniques to spread the Gospel and 2) an effective witness treats his converts like they are family.

9. **What are some ways that Jesus' ministry in the Gospels was both countercultural (outworldly) and familial in nature?**

In 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 Paul uses the example of his ministry to demonstrate effective means to spread the Gospel to others. But most importantly, Paul's example emulates Jesus' ministry in both connecting with Jews and Gentiles seeking the Truth and in the family relationships he established with his closest followers, namely the disciples. Jesus genuinely loved His followers and inspired them to spread the Gospel throughout the world. We are called to do the same by working hard, being gentle, and showing genuine love and affection for those we are reaching out to. Our ministry should emulate and reflect both Paul's and Jesus' examples.

Closing/application

Paul is teaching his followers in these passages how to guide new believers into becoming lifelong followers of Christ. To do this, we need to apply effort and we need to approach the task like a selfless mother or father would approach their family. An understanding of God's Word and our own faithfulness to God are the only prerequisites necessary to take on this calling. Without faithfulness the sheep will be prone to stray and the roots will not be deep. With only a shallow understanding of God's Word, the sheep might be prone to misinterpret the lessons God has for their life. Paul's example of self-sacrificial ministry is an inspiring testimony to our own ministry.

References:

Bible.org, 2020, "4. A Compelling Example for Ministry (1 Thess. 2:1-12)," from the series: 1: Thessalonians: An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary, available online: <https://bible.org/seriespage/4-compelling-example-ministry-1-thess-21-12> (03 January 2021).

Quak, Allan, 27 Sep 2019, "Gospelling Like Paul," sermon, available online:

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/gospelling-like-paul-allan-quak-sermon-on-evangelism-242479?page=3&wc=800> (03 January 2021).