

COOPERATING WITH THE HEAVENLY MINISTRY OF THE ASCENDED CHRIST

(Friday—Evening Session)

Message Three

The Pattern of the Apostle Paul in Cooperating with Christ's Heavenly Ministry to Shepherd People for the Building Up of the Body of Christ

Scripture Reading: Acts 20:17-20, 28, 31; 26:16-19; 2 Cor. 11:28-29; 12:15; 1 Thes. 2:1-12

- I. Paul was a pattern of cooperating with Christ's heavenly ministry to shepherd people for the building up of the Body of Christ—Heb. 13:20; John 10:11, 14-15; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4; Acts 20:17-20, 28, 31; 26:16-19; 2 Cor. 11:28-29; 12:15; Eph. 4:11-12, 15-16.**
- II. The apostles were a pattern of the glad tidings that they spread—"you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake"—1 Thes. 1:5b:**
 - A. In the church the most important thing is the person; the person is the way, and the person is the Lord's work; what you are is what you do—John 5:19; 6:57; Phil. 1:19-26; Acts 20:18-35; Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33-37.
 - B. We need to follow the pattern of the apostles to pay more attention to life than to work—John 12:24; 2 Cor. 4:12.
- III. Paul was a pattern to the believers of living and ministering Christ as the Spirit in his spirit for the building up of the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 1:16; 4:12; Rom. 8:16:**
 - A. The Lord appeared to Paul to make him a minister and a witness of the things in which Paul had seen Him and of the things in which He would appear to Paul—Acts 26:16-19; cf. 1:8; 23:11; 20:20, 31.
 - B. Paul took Christ as everything—as his living, pattern, goal, and secret—Phil. 1:19-21a; 2:5-16; 3:7-14; 4:11-13.
 - C. Paul lived by the Spirit, walked by the Spirit, sowed unto the Spirit, and ministered the Spirit as a spiritual man who lived and served in his spirit—Gal. 5:16, 25; 6:8; 2 Cor. 3:6; 1 Cor. 2:15; 2 Cor. 2:13; Rom. 1:9; 8:16.
 - D. Paul was infused with God to shine forth God in the ministry of the new covenant, which is the ministry of the Spirit, the ministry of righteousness, and the ministry of reconciliation—2 Cor. 3:18; 4:1; 3:6, 8-9; 5:18-20.
 - E. Paul lived and did everything in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body—Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:1-6, 15-16; Col. 2:19.
- IV. The best way to shepherd people, to cherish and nourish them, is to give them a proper pattern; Paul fed his spiritual children with his own living of Christ—1 Thes. 2:1-12; 2 Cor. 1:23—2:14; 11:28-29; 1 Cor. 9:22; Acts 20:28:**
 - A. The apostles not only preached the gospel but also lived it; their ministering of the gospel was not only by word but also by a life that displayed the power of God, a life in the Holy Spirit and in the assurance of faith—1 Thes. 1:5.

- B. The saints in Thessalonica became imitators of the apostles; this led them to follow the Lord, to take Him as their pattern, thus making them a pattern to all other believers—vv. 6-7.
- C. The apostle Paul stressed repeatedly the apostles' entrance toward the believers; this shows that their manner of life played a great role in infusing the gospel into the new converts—vv. 5, 9; 2:1:
1. The apostles were struggling and speaking the gospel to the Thessalonians in the boldness of God—v. 2.
 2. The apostles were free from deception, uncleanness, and guile—v. 3.
 3. The apostles were first tested and approved by God and then were entrusted by Him with the gospel; hence, their speaking, the preaching of the gospel, was not of themselves to please men but of God to please Him; God proved, examined, and tested their hearts continually—v. 4; Psa. 26:2; 139:23-24; 2 Cor. 1:12; 6:6; 7:3.
 4. The apostles were never found with flattering speech or with a pretext for covetousness—1 Thes. 2:5:
 - a. To have any pretext for covetousness is to peddle or adulterate the word of God—2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2.
 - b. It is also to pretend to be godly for the sake of gain—1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:3.
 5. The apostles did not seek glory from men—1 Thes. 2:6a:
 - a. To seek glory from men is a real temptation to every Christian worker; many have been devoured and spoiled by this matter—cf. 1 Sam. 15:12.
 - b. Lucifer became God's adversary, Satan, because of glory-seeking; anyone who seeks glory from men is a follower of Satan—Ezek. 28:13-17; Isa. 14:12-15; Matt. 4:8-10.
 - c. How much we will be used by the Lord and how long our usefulness will last depend on whether we seek glory from men—cf. John 7:17-18; 5:39-44; 12:43; 2 Cor. 4:5.
 6. The apostles did not stand on their authority or dignity as apostles of Christ—1 Thes. 2:6b:
 - a. To assert authority, dignity, or right in Christian work damages that work; the Lord Jesus, while on earth, gave up His dignity (John 13:4-5), and the apostle preferred not to use his right (1 Cor. 9:12).
 - b. If we follow this pattern, we shall kill a deadly disease germ in the Body of Christ, the germ of assuming a position—Matt. 20:20-28.
 7. The apostles cherished the believers and yearned over them as a nursing mother would cherish and yearn over her own children—1 Thes. 2:7-8; cf. Gal. 4:19; Isa. 49:14-15; 66:12-13:
 - a. To cherish people is to make them happy, to comfort them, to make them feel that you are pleasant to them, easy to be contacted in everything and in every way.
 - b. To cherish people in our natural humanity is not genuine; we must cherish people with the Lord's presence as the charming factor, as the reality of resurrection.

- c. Cherishing includes nourishing; to nourish people is to feed them with the all-inclusive Christ in His full ministry of three stages—Eph. 5:29.
- 8. The apostles not only imparted the gospel of God to the Thessalonians; they also imparted their own souls—1 Thes. 2:8:
 - a. To live a clean and upright life (vv. 3-6, 10) and to love the new converts, even by giving our own souls to them (vv. 7-9, 11), are the prerequisites for infusing them with the gospel.
 - b. Paul was willing to spend not only what he had but also himself, his very being, on behalf of the saints—2 Cor. 12:15.
- 9. The apostles considered themselves as fathers in exhorting the believers to walk worthily of God, to have a walk that will enable them to enter into the kingdom of God and usher them into the glory of God—1 Thes. 2:11-12:
 - a. As worshippers of idols (1:9), the believers were in the kingdom of Satan (Matt. 12:26).
 - b. Now, through the salvation in Christ they were called, and they have believed into the kingdom of God, which is the sphere in which they can worship and enjoy God under the divine ruling with the view of entering into God’s glory.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE APOSTLES’ ENTRANCE

First Thessalonians 2:1 says, “For you yourselves know, brothers, our entrance to you, that it has not been in vain.” The apostle stresses repeatedly their entrance to the believers (1:5, 9). This shows that their manner of life played a great role in infusing the gospel into the new converts. It was not only what the apostles said, but also what they were.

The apostles came to the Thessalonians with the gospel in such a way that the Thessalonians were convinced. The apostles’ entrance was not in vain. They were a pattern of how to believe in the Lord and follow Him. Because many came to believe in the Lord Jesus through the apostles, a church was raised up in less than a month. This happened not mainly as a result of preaching and teaching, but through the kind of entrance the apostles had among the Thessalonians.

SPEAKING THE GOSPEL IN MUCH STRUGGLE

Verse 2 continues, “But having suffered before and having been outrageously treated, even as you know, in Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much struggle.” In the preaching of the gospel, the apostles experienced God. They enjoyed Him as their boldness in the struggle for the gospel. They were bold not in themselves, but in God, even after they had been outrageously treated by the Philippians. Suffering and persecution could not defeat them because they were in the organic union with the Triune God. According to verse 2, they spoke the gospel of God in much struggle. This indicates that while they were preaching, they were fighting, because persecution was still going on. Hence, they were struggling and speaking the gospel to the Thessalonians in the boldness of God.

HONEST AND FAITHFUL

In verse 3 Paul says, “For our entreaty was not of deception, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile.” *Deception* refers to the goal, *uncleanness* to the motive, and *guile* to the means. All three are of and by the subtle and deceiving devil. The word *entreaty* includes speaking,

preaching, teaching, instructing, and exhorting. Paul's exhorting was free from deception, uncleanness, and guile. The apostles were not greedy, and they had no intention of making a gain of anyone. Their coming to the Thessalonians with the gospel was altogether honest and faithful.

APPROVED BY GOD

Verse 4 says, "But even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who proves our hearts." God's entrusting depends on His approval by His testing. The apostles were first tested and approved by God and then were entrusted by Him with the gospel. Hence, their speaking, the preaching of the gospel, was not of themselves to please men, but was of God to please Him. He proves, examines, and tests their hearts all the time (Psa. 26:2; 139:23-24).

The word *approved* in 1 Thessalonians 2:4 implies being tested. God tested the apostles before He approved them. Based upon this approvedness, God entrusted them with the gospel. God did this in a careful way, for He knows our hearts.

According to our opinion, since God already knows everything, it is not necessary for Him to test us. Yes, before we were born, He already knew what kind of person we would be. Why, then, does God test us? God's testing is not mainly for Himself; it is primarily for us. God knows us, but we do not know ourselves. Because we do not know ourselves adequately, we may think that we are upright, honest, and faithful. However, when we are put to the test, we shall see what we really are and discover that in ourselves we are not honest, faithful, or trustworthy. God's testing, therefore, proves us to ourselves. Only after God proves us in this way shall we have approvedness.

I would encourage the young people not to have confidence in themselves, for they have not yet been tested. I have the assurance that God will use the young people. But God's using of them will come after His testing of them. God cannot entrust anything to us until we have the approvedness that comes from His testing. God's entrusting is based on our approvedness. But we cannot approve ourselves. Only after God has tested us will He grant us approvedness. Then He will entrust something to us and begin to use us.

It was in this way that God entrusted the apostles with the gospel. Because the apostles had been entrusted with the gospel, they spoke not as pleasing men, but as pleasing God, who proves our hearts. Their speaking was based on God's entrusting. Because He had entrusted them with the gospel, they spoke as pleasing God.

In verse 4 we see that we must be approved and then have something entrusted to us. Then we need to speak as pleasing God, the One who proves us. This indicates that we need to pass through testing, approving, and entrusting. Then we shall have something to preach and teach.

NO FLATTERY OR PRETEXT

Verse 5 says, "For neither at any time were we found with a word of flattery, even as you know, nor with a pretext for covetousness—God is witness." The Greek word rendered "pretext" also means "pretense, cloak." To have any pretext for covetousness is to peddle or adulterate the word of God (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2). It is also to pretend to be godly for gain (1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:3).

According to 1 Thessalonians 2:5, the apostles were never found with a word of flattery. We all must avoid flattery, never speaking in a way to flatter others. In this verse Paul also says that the apostles did not have a pretext, a cloak, for covetousness. They did not have an evil motive that was covered in some way. Because they did not have any pretext or pretense,

they did not peddle the word of God or adulterate it. To adulterate something is to mix it with an inferior material, for example, to mix gold with copper or wine with water, and then to sell it as if it were pure. Throughout the centuries, many preachers and teachers have adulterated the word of God in this way. They preached under a pretext in order to make gain for themselves.

From verse 5 we learn to avoid flattery and a pretext for covetousness. In our Christian work we must give no place to such unclean things. No servant of the Lord should use flattery or have some kind of pretext for covetousness. May the Lord have mercy on us and purify us from all these things. May we be able to say that God is our witness that we do not speak words of flattery or have any pretext for covetousness.

NOT SEEKING GLORY FROM MEN

In verse 6 Paul goes on to say, “Nor seeking glory of men, neither from you, nor from others, when we might have stood on our dignity as apostles of Christ.” To seek glory of men is a real temptation to every Christian worker. Many have been devoured and spoiled by this matter.

The Greek words rendered “stood on our dignity” also mean “asserted authority.” A literal translation would be “been able to be in weight,” that is, been burdensome (see v. 9; 1 Cor. 9:4-12). To assert authority, dignity, or right in Christian work also damages it. The Lord Jesus, while on earth, gave up His dignity (John 13:4-5), and the apostle would rather not use his right (1 Cor. 9:12).

Apparently, seeking glory from men is not as evil as covetousness. However, it is more subtle. The fall of the archangel was due to the seeking of glory. He became God’s adversary because of his glory-seeking. Even though he was a leading angel with a very high position, he was still seeking glory. That was the cause of his fall. According to the New Testament, anyone who seeks glory of men is a follower of Satan. The seeking of glory is a trap spread by Satan to snare Christian workers. Therefore, it is very important that all Christian workers learn to avoid the snare of glory-seeking. However, not many have escaped this trap.

How much we shall be used by the Lord and how long our usefulness will last depend on whether we seek glory of men. If we seek glory, our usefulness in the hand of the Lord is finished. The seeking of glory for the self always kills one’s usefulness. Therefore, may we all, especially the young, be warned never to seek glory in the Lord’s work.

NOT STANDING ON THEIR DIGNITY

First Thessalonians 2:6 indicates clearly that the apostles did not stand on their dignity as apostles of Christ. They did not assume any standing or dignity. They had to forget that they were apostles and serve God’s people as slaves. They were not to remind others of the fact that they were apostles of Christ. Instead, they were to keep in mind that they were brothers serving believers. They were not to assume any standing or dignity.

Those who are believers and also those who are not believers may consider the leading ones, the elders, or the apostles as dignitaries. However, in the local churches there are no dignitaries. Instead of being dignitaries, we are slaves serving one another. Nevertheless, I know of certain ones who did not assume anything when they did not have a position or title. But as soon as they were given a position, perhaps in a service group, they began to assume dignity. This is shameful. We should learn of Paul never to stand on our dignity or assert authority.

A sister whose husband is an elder should not assume dignity because she is the wife of an elder. An elder’s wife is not the “First Lady.” She is simply a little sister serving the

church. Furthermore, her husband is not a dignitary; he is a slave. As an elder, he has been appointed to serve the church as a slave. We all should have this attitude.

Paul's statement, "We might have stood on our dignity as apostles of Christ," indicates that even in the early days there was the temptation of assuming dignity. People were the same in Paul's time as they are today. Then as well as now, there was the temptation to assume some kind of dignity or standing. Paul, however, did not stand on his dignity as an apostle in order to claim something for himself. By refusing to stand on his dignity or assert authority Paul is a good pattern for us all. If we follow this pattern, we shall kill a deadly disease germ in the Body of Christ, the germ of assuming a position.

CHERISHING THE BELIEVERS

In verse 7 Paul says, "But we were gentle in your midst, as a nurse would cherish her own children." The Greek word rendered "nurse," *trophos*, sometimes means a mother; hence, it may denote a nursing mother (see Gal. 4:19). Cherishing includes nourishing. Therefore, this word not only includes nourishing but also includes tender care.

Even though Paul was a brother, he considered himself a nursing mother. Surely, he had no thought of position, dignity, or authority. The thought of being a nursing mother is very different from the thought of dignity or position. What position does a nursing mother have? What rank, dignity, or authority belongs to her? Her dignity consists in nourishing and cherishing her children, in taking care of them in a tender way.

The word *cherish* is lovely, a word of utmost tenderness. Paul regarded himself as a cherishing one, not merely as one who serves. He certainly did not control the believers. Neither did he merely serve them. Rather, he cherished them. His care for them was full of tenderness.

IMPARTING THEIR OWN SOULS

In verse 8 Paul continues, "Thus, yearning over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us." The word *yearning* indicates being affectionately fond of, affectionately desirous of, like a nursing mother affectionately interested in her child whom she nourishes and cherishes. This was what the apostles did with the new believers.

The apostles not only imparted the gospel of God to the Thessalonians; they also imparted their own souls. To live a clean and upright life as portrayed in verses 3 through 6 and 10, and to love the new converts, even by giving our own souls to them, as described in verses 7 through 9 and 11, are the prerequisites for infusing others with the salvation conveyed in the gospel we preach.

Paul's word in verse 8 about imparting their own souls to the Thessalonians can be compared to his word in 2 Corinthians 12 about being spent for the sake of the believers. Paul was willing to spend not only what he had, but was willing to spend himself, his very being. The apostles were willing to impart what they were into the believers. This can be compared to a nursing mother giving herself to her child.

THE APOSTLES' CONDUCT

First Thessalonians 2:9 says, "For you remember, brothers, our labor and hardship: working night and day so as not to be burdensome to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God." The apostles did not want to be a burden on the Thessalonians. Therefore, they labored night and day in order to proclaim to them the gospel of God.

In verse 10 Paul continues, "You are witnesses, and God, how holily and righteously and

blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you who believe.” *Holily* refers to conduct toward God, *righteously* to conduct toward men, and *blamelessly* to all—God, men, and Satan. In order to conduct himself in this way, Paul had to exercise strict control over himself. Verse 10 reveals that the apostles were those who practiced self-control.

A FATHER EXHORTING HIS CHILDREN

Verse 11 says, “Even as you know how we were to each one of you, as a father his own children, entreating you and consoling and testifying.” The apostle was strong in stressing what or how they were (1:5), for what they were opened the way to bring the new converts into God’s full salvation.

In 2:11 Paul likens himself to a father exhorting his children. In cherishing the believers as their own children, the apostles considered themselves as nourishing mothers. In exhorting them, they considered themselves fathers.

WALKING WORTHILY OF GOD

Verse 12 says, “That you should walk worthily of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” God’s calling is according to His selection, and it follows His selection (1:4). As worshippers of idols (v. 9), the believers were in the kingdom of Satan (Matt. 12:26). Now, through the salvation in Christ, they are called and have believed into the kingdom of God, which is the sphere for them to worship and enjoy God under the divine ruling with a view of entering into God’s glory. God’s glory goes with His kingdom.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:12 Paul exhorts the believers to walk worthily of God. If he himself had not walked worthily of God, how could he have exhorted others to do so? In this matter also, he set an example for the believers to follow.

Verse 12 indicates that walking worthily of God is related to entering into His kingdom and being ushered into His glory. The thought here, in contrast to that in verses 1 through 11, is quite deep. Here we have a matter often neglected by Christians. Not many believers are taught to have a Christian walk that will enable them to enter into the kingdom of God, a walk that will usher them into God’s glory. Many Christians have never heard such a word. Nevertheless, this is included as part of Paul’s teaching to young believers.

A GOOD PATTERN

First Thessalonians 2:1-12 shows us how we should conduct ourselves as a pattern for new believers. In order to be a proper pattern, we need to be pure in our motives, especially concerning money. Much of what is written in these verses is related to money, greed, and covetousness. If we are not pure concerning money, if we are not sincere, honest, and faithful regarding it, we may be among those who adulterate the word of God and peddle it. Furthermore, this motive may cause us to use flattery and to have a pretext for covetousness. All these are serious matters. Therefore, if we would be a proper pattern for young saints, our greed must be dealt with, and money matters must be under our feet. We should never speak words of flattery, we should never have any pretext, and we should never seek glory for ourselves. Moreover, instead of trying to please man, we should do our best to please God. Then other believers will have a good pattern to follow.

If you consider the situation among believers today, you will realize that many Christians have no sense of direction. The reason for this lack of direction is that they do not have a proper pattern. We need to be a pattern to others and foster them, cherishing them as mothers and exhorting them as fathers to walk worthily of God. As we have pointed out in a foregoing message, to walk worthily of God is actually to live God. Only a life that lives God

is worthy of God. When we live God, we walk worthily of Him. Such a walk will lead us into the kingdom and usher us into the glory of God. This is the goal of God's calling. God has called us to enter His kingdom and glory. (*Life-study of 1 Thessalonians*, pp. 97-105)