

5. The Apostolic Example (3Q 2012—1 and 2 Thessalonians)

Biblical material: 1 Thess. 2:1–12, Acts 16, Deut. 10:16, Ps. 51:1–10, 2 Cor. 8:1–5, Luke 11:11–13.

Quotes

- Too much of our Christianity today is drenched with sentiment, but devoid of sacrifice. *Frank Farley*
- The only life that counts is the life that costs. *Frederick P. Wood*
- The sign of our professed love for the gospel is the measure of sacrifice we are prepared to make in order to help its progress. *Ralph P. Martin*
- What makes life dreary is the absence of motive. What makes life complicated is multiplicity of motive. What makes life victorious is singleness of motive. *George Eliot*
- Those who have a “why” to live can bear with almost any “how.” *Victor E. Frankl*
- Spiritual life depends on the purposes we cherish. *C. H. Spurgeon*

Questions

What can we learn from Paul’s example here? How can we act from true motives? How do we relate to the misuse of positions, especially within the church? How do we avoid defining success by numbers? Are there ways to make sure we always remain principle-based? What do we learn about God here?

Bible summary

In 1 Thess. 2:1–12 Paul reviews his experience together with the people of Thessalonica. He recalls how he arrived after being beaten in Philippi (the background story is in Acts 16). He also reminds them that he came with no personal agenda or bad motives. He wasn’t looking to benefit or gain praise. Even though he could have expected to have been supported by these people he had helped discover the gospel, he chose to work. Most of all he treated them as his children, acting as their father.

The gospel appeal echoes that of the Old Testament: “Change your hearts, and stop being stubborn.” (Deut. 10:16 NLT). The plea is that of David, recognizing his sinful state (Ps. 51:1-10). Paul reports on the churches of Macedonia, which included the Thessalonians—how they were kind and generous despite their poverty (2 Cor. 8:1-5). Jesus’ words in Luke 11:11-13 are referenced, indicating what kind of person God is in his compassionate mercy towards us.

Comment

“Paul was less concerned with growing the church in numbers than with its growing, through God’s grace, in the right spiritual principles.” (Sabbath afternoon’s lesson). How can we follow this approach when in our organization the focus does seem to be on numbers? And as the lesson also asks, what is our true motive? We need to carefully reconsider our approach as we follow “the apostolic example”!

Paul uses his own experience as a “case study” to show not only the theory but the practicalities of sharing the gospel. He affirms that “we were not preaching with any

deceit or impure motives or trickery.” (1 Thess. 2:3 NLT). He goes on to make clear that this is a selfless witness, not looking for payment or praise. All too often other motivations come into the preaching of the gospel: power, fame, wealth etc. But Paul rejects such misuses of the ministry, urging the Thessalonians to keep their motives pure.

He even makes it clear that he was not a burden to them, and that he chose to earn his living even though he could rightfully have expected them to help him. Paul preferred not to be indebted to them so there could be no accusations that he was “preaching for profit.” In this way he could counter any naysayers who might try to impugn his motives or assassinate his character. Here we have another good example of not only avoiding evil but even the appearance of evil. Paul’s role was like a father to them. This was no business arrangement—he is saying “We are family.” So his efforts for them are based not on any thought of personal gain, but come from a heart of self-sacrificing love. In this way Paul truly represented the character of his loving Lord.

This leads us on to applying these principles way beyond the experience of the Thessalonians. How do they relate to our experience, and our place in the whole sweep of history, of our participation in the great controversy? Concepts of true motivation, purity of character, and use of power are at the heart of this cosmic conflict, and apply to us as much as to the nature and actions of God! How can we be a spectacle to the universe without identifying with and practicing God’s principles and methods? Only as our lives are changed to we are aligned with the will of God and his nature can we truly be his witnesses. This means taking the central issue way beyond one of theory and debate, and having the love of God shine throughout our daily lives.

Ellen White Comments

If ministers would make the actions of each day a subject of careful thought and deliberate review, with the object to become acquainted with their own habits of life, they would better know themselves. By a close scrutiny of their daily life under all circumstances, they would know their own motives, the principles which actuate them. This daily review of our acts, to see whether conscience approves or condemns, is necessary for all who wish to arrive at the perfection of Christian character. Many acts which pass for good works, even deeds of benevolence, will, when closely investigated, be found to be prompted by wrong motives. Many receive applause for virtues which they do not possess. The Searcher of hearts inspects motives, and often the deeds which are highly applauded by men are recorded by him as springing from selfish motives and base hypocrisy. Every act of our lives, whether excellent and praiseworthy or deserving of censure, is judged by the Searcher of hearts according to the motives which prompted it. {GW92 110-11}

Everywhere there is a tendency to substitute the work of organizations for individual effort. Human wisdom tends to consolidation, to centralization, to the building up of great churches and institutions. Multitudes leave to institutions and organizations the work of benevolence; they excuse themselves from contact with the world, and their hearts grow cold. They become self-absorbed and unimpressible. Love for God and man dies out of the soul. Christ commits to His followers an individual work--a work that cannot be done by proxy. Ministry to the sick and the poor, the giving of the gospel to the lost, is not to be left to committees or organized charities. Individual responsibility, individual effort, personal sacrifice, is the requirement of the gospel. {MH 147}

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