

Commending Ourselves To Everyone's Conscience In God's Sight

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Date: 06 February 2011

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 2, the opening part of it, on page 1048.

We'll just read from the beginning. For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

But even after we had suffered before, and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

These verses, 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 1 to 4. And we may take as a title for this, Commending Ourselves to Every Man's Conscience in the Sight of God.

[1 : 36] Commending Ourselves to Every Man's Conscience in the Sight of God. That reminds us that we ought not to be afraid to assert the genuineness and the purity of our motives in Christian service.

Sometimes that's necessary. And this is effectively an apostolic precept. That's exactly what Paul says we should do.

Paul and his fellow missionaries were, after and all, imitators of Christ. They modeled themselves on the Lord Jesus Christ, having been saved freely by his grace.

They then lived life according to his pattern. And that should be the way we look at things. The fact of the matter is that in life, life is complicated as we know.

And the fact is that often people outside the church will criticize us and slam to us and cast us persons on our character and our motives too.

[2 : 47] You've heard no doubt if you've sought to share the news about Jesus with people. The starting line with many people. The thing about church is, most of the folk that go there are hypocrites.

That's what you hear. And that is their defense. That's their first line of defense. And they cast us persons on the character of those who attend the church and who profess the Christian way.

But bad so that is and difficult so that is, it's worse when it happens from within the Christian community. That is far more difficult to cope with and painful too, when Christians talk about each other against each other.

And Paul seeks here to show his genuineness and purity of motive within the Christian community as it then was in Thessalonica. That was his business.

It wasn't those outside the church, but those inside it who were casting as persons on his character and slandering his name. And that of his fellow missionaries, of course.

[4 : 09] And so, under God, he seeks to show his genuineness and purity of motive and that of his fellow missionaries too.

And he appeals, interestingly and instructively, he appeals to what the people themselves know. You know.

In fact, there's an emphatic here, for you yourselves know. You yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

So, the first thing we want to do here in looking at what Paul shows us here about commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

We want to listen to him and learn from him. First of all, to consider the genuine conduct of Paul and his fellow missionaries.

[5 : 12] The genuine conduct of the missionaries. And he appeals to their experience, knowledge of himself and his fellow missionaries.

Now, we've noticed that the passage we've been looking at in Acts 16 has to do with Paul's second missionary journey.

There was a good measure of success in Philippi, although there was hostility there and persecution as we saw.

And then he moves on and he eventually lands in Thessalonica. And he has God's blessing there too, but he has also hardship and opposition and persecution.

But what was most hurting was the suggestion that he and his fellow missionaries were not genuine. And he says to them, to the Thessalonians themselves, You know that our coming to you was not in vain.

[6 : 25] We came not to take, but to give. Our entering in among you was not empty handed. The idea, in fact, William Hendrickson translates it like that.

It was not empty handed as if all we were doing was trying to grab what we could. No, no. We came, not empty handed, but we came laden, as it were, with good news.

And the desire to impart that for your eternal well-being. You see, some suggested that Paul and his fellows were false and selfish.

Their motives were wrong. They were in it for the money. They worked on people's fears. They tried to stir up a fear of damnation in them.

And they promised them peace at a price. That's what they were being accused of, more or less. And it was simply not true. And he says, you yourselves know.

[7 : 29] You know that wasn't the way. You know we came with fullness of heart, laden with this message. And he's saying effectively, think about it.

Think about it. Even although we were shamefully treated at Philippi, verse 2. We came to you. And we read in that passage in Acts 16, from verse 23, particularly verses 23 and 24.

We were flogged with rods. My image is like bamboo canes. They were lashed until they had furrows in their backs and bleeding furrows at that.

For the gospel. In order to communicate words of eternal life to people. Not for gain. Selfish gain.

But for the good of others. And that's what we got. That was our pay, he says. We were beaten, bleeding and imprisoned.

[8 : 38] The law itself was against us and it shouldn't have been. Paul was a Roman and a free man at that. So were his companions.

And they were unlawfully treated as well as brutally treated. And why he brings this in is because he's saying to the Thessalonians, look we came to you after we'd been there.

There was enough happened to us in Philippi to send us out of the ministry of the word altogether. Enough's enough, we could have said.

Matters were a little better in Thessalonica, in fact. You remember that the Jews who believed not stirred up the people against Paul and against his fellows.

So that they had it hard there too from those who opposed the truth. There was so much going on, you see, that was negative.

[9 : 48] That in actual fact demonstrated the genuineness of their motives and the purity of their motives in being there.

The Jews who had believed not inflicted agony upon Paul and his fellows.

And Paul persisted in speaking the words of life to the people. They wanted people to know about King Jesus, whether they were opposed or not.

Necessity laid it upon them, not greedy gain, but necessity. Woe is me if I preach not the gospel. That was Paul's approach. And it hurt him, and rightly hurt him, when folk were cooking up stories against him.

And so, within this point, he appeals to the purity of their conduct. Verse 3 For our exhortation did not come from error, or uncleanness, or deceit.

[11 : 01] The enemy was at work, you see, in slandering Paul and his fellows in Thessalonica. This fellow and his helpers are insincere, they're impure, they're greedy, they're immoral.

So, it's apparent that there were those who were charging Paul and his fellows with both a lack of integrity and morality.

And he says, you know yourselves. Our message was not like that. Our conduct was not like that.

For all that there were those seeking to bring charges against them. The proof was in the Thessalonians themselves. We were not like that.

Even though there were many women converted and joined the church and were taught by us, our motives and conduct were pure.

[12 : 10] That's what he's saying. And he persevered in his work. Because he knew that God would vindicate him.

God would prevail upon people. And you see, it's important for ourselves. This has got relevance to ourselves. It's important for us to consider how we view one another within the church and how we view the ministry within the church.

We were just talking about that partly in connection with Kenny Stewart moving on. It's all very painful to us. But no man, even the best of ministers, is perfect or anything like it.

We all have our short-sightedness. We all have our limitations. We're all struggling in this body. Paul said himself, the good that I would, I sometimes don't do.

And the evil that I don't want to do, I sometimes find myself doing. And the only one who can deliver the wretched man is Christ. And therefore, you see, it's important for us to be sensitive to this and to guard ourselves against this all-too-easy tendency of spreading an evil report.

[13 : 39] Both against one another and preachers and teachers of the word. Paul contends, you see, that if they were honest about it themselves in Thessalonica, they would have to admit he was right.

For you yourselves know, brethren. You know our exhortation did not come, verse 3, from error or uncleanness immorality, nor was it in deceit.

We weren't trying to catch you and make a packet out of you. Well, may we learn something from this. And may we have the grace to be slow to speak and slower still to take up an evil report.

Let us be concerned with the eternal well-being of one another. And then we will help each other, we'll support each other and bear with each other along the way.

That, then, is the first thing we wanted to consider. The genuine conduct in word and deed of these missionaries.

[14 : 52] And the second thing is the missionaries were God-pleasers. That was evermost. You see, he says, verse 4, But, as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

And you see, what he says here is that they had knowledge of the trust that was committed to them.

We have been approved by God. That was first. Paul could say for himself and his missionary friends, we have been approved by God. This is really the only way that men should go into the ministry with a sense of being called by God and approved by God.

Those who have this burden imparted to them, this sense of woe is me, convinced of the Lord, that he has approved them.

We have been approved, he says, by God, to be entrusted with the gospel. No doubt, even Scottish church history shows us that there have been many who have gone into the ministry for all sorts of reasons that had little to do with this apostolic precept being approved by God and entrusted by him with the gospel.

[16 : 43] I remember years ago, and it is years ago now, decades ago, when Clement Graham was teaching us at Pastor Aurelia, looking at the wrong reasons for going into the ministry.

And, you know, he would talk about people who want to go into it because they have a love of theological books and they get time to read them and study them and spout off what they know.

People go in because of the prestige of it, to be standing up and spouting off the opportunity to lord it over others and perhaps just because for many it's a cushy number, a comfortable way to live.

And it was said by Thomas Chalmers of himself, something to the effect that when he was a moderate minister, he was a minister in the church before he was converted to Christ.

He knew in his head the Westminster Confession very well and could expound it. But for him, there was nothing to do now.

[18 : 01] That was only just a small part of how he made his living. He gave lectures. As you know, he was very able in different areas of learning, of mathematics and other aspects too.

And the ministry was a breeze to him. But when he became a man under authority, approved by God, converted to Christ, and entrusted with the gospel, his understanding was revolutionized.

He saw the thing so differently. He saw that this was something that he was now devoting his life to. And whenever he lectured on other issues, it was within the context of necessity has laid it upon me.

Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. I've been approved by God. I've been entrusted by him. That was his approach. And I think it's helpful to us in our day that we pray all the more about those that the Lord would bring into the ministry, that he brings them in as approved of him.

The church doesn't get it right. The church may ask somebody to come into the ministry because they're eloquent and learned. They've taught in school, in high school or something like that.

[19 : 26] Therefore, they can be a minister. That's not what it's about. Paul says, but as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak.

It's God's approval. It's God's selection. It's God's testing of them that fits them for the work. We have heard over the years that this one and that one would be good for the ministry, better for the ministry because, and usually it has to do simply with the things I've mentioned already, academic attainments and eloquence and so on.

Paul's concern was that he and his fellows have been approved by God.

Faithful preachers of the word ultimately are chosen by God. And it's even wrong to say the church first chooses.

It ought to be the case that a man has a burden, and I say a man, has a burden for the ministry because God has been that burden there.

[20 : 56] The classic example of this, in my own mind, for all that he never went to theological college, he equipped himself superbly as Dr.

Martin Lloyd-Jones was a Harley Street doctor, as you know, and he was burdened and constrained to become a minister of the gospel.

And you only need to know something of Harley Street and its potential for making plenty cash. He gave it all up to become a poor minister of the gospel.

And he did it because God laid this upon his heart. Now, I admit, he was exceptional. But that's the way it should be.

Approved of God, entrusted by God. The church then may recognize that the church has often mistakenly put this one or that one in with serious consequences, as we know.

[22 : 07] God chooses. God equips. God uses all the experience a man has passed through to fit him for the ministry.

And when all is said and done, that doesn't make him perfect. God does shape and fashion.

And my image, I used to watch one as a boy, a blacksmith. He was as big as a door and immensely strong.

He could catch the beak of the anvil and lift the thing like that. And I used to be fascinated watching him shaping the horseshoes and making other things at the anvil.

Loved to see the sparks going up as he belted the thing around the anvil. And I say that because, you know, God works on those that he approves for the ministry.

[23 : 06] He beats them into shape. He heats them up. He puts them in the furnace of trial. And he molds and shapes them and tempers them. You know that if you plunge a horseshoe into water, you have one effect.

If you plunge it into oil, you have another effect. If you let it simply go cold, slowly, naturally, you'll have another effect. It will not be the same.

It has changed. And God knows how to mold and shape those that he approves for the ministry. Yes, he hammers them into shape sometimes.

And he tempers them always by his grace. And Paul, you see, was in that position. Paul wasn't sufficient in himself for all his learning.

Our sufficiency, he said, is of God, who has made us able ministers of a new covenant. Paul gloried in the fact that God Almighty, who knew Paul through and through, who knew that before he had been a persecutor, counted him fit to become a minister of the gospel.

[24 : 27] He counted me faithful. He appointed me to the ministry. And so Paul is up front about this. He says, you know this, Thessalonians.

Confirm it to your own conscience. Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And therefore we can take away at least this much to pray all the more for the Lord to raise up men for the ministry in our day.

That he will shape and temper and make sufficient for the work of the gospel in our day.

We don't want hirelings who know not the Lord, who have no experience of him. We want them to be fitted by the Lord himself for the work of the gospel.

We need to pray then. And the Lord knows there's a need in our day for men for the ministry of the gospel.

[25 : 40] And the last thing within this point is, Paul and his friends were God-pleasers. Approved by God, verse 4.

But, and the second part of it, not as pleasing men, but God who proves our hearts.

This is what he was concerned with. And this is what you and me have to be concerned with. That we live us unto God. That we commend ourselves to one another and to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

That we live lives that we can say this all. We commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Let there be no Jacob in us. We speak not as pleasing men, but as pleasing the all-seeing and all-knowing God who tries our hearts.

[26 : 46] Who examines us. Who knows us through and through. And who knows our motives. We need to be concerned.

To live as those who are approved of God. And who speak as before God. And not men. It's all too easy for a preacher of the word to speak in a way that pleases people.

I might have told you before, but when I was a lad, the villages in Sellafield on the east coast were fairly close together.

And in those days folks knew the folk in the next village and so on. And they certainly knew the ministers even though they had necessarily no interest in the gospel.

They just became acquainted. And there was a man called Abel who was a minister. And the local folks, the grown-ups used to say that the thing about Abel was he was able to turn things around to suit whatever audience he was listening to.

[27 : 54] Were listening to him rather. And I thought that was a telling thing about him. He was able to put a spin on things that suited everybody.

That's not as pleasing God. And Paul's concern was this has got to be evermost. And this is what you need to pray for for your minister and for ministers.

That they will speak as pleasing God and not men. This guy that I refer to, he was comfortable in any company.

Another one of renown of a kind anyway. Could be found in the public house.

At after closing time on a Saturday evening. And he was loved by the people. We speak not as pleasing men.

[28 : 58] But God. Who tries and tests our hearts. And you want to pray that your minister and those you listen to in the preaching of the word.

Will not be folk that tell you just be nice and good and kind. Do your best and you'll get there. But to help you to understand. What it is to be in a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And living for him. And concerned to do things his way. And to live as in his sight. And to speak as in his sight.

We speak. Not as pleasing men. But God who tests our hearts. If.

If. We suddenly. Change direction. And started to tell folk. That it was all about just doing your best.

- [30 : 03] You don't need to worry about the. The cross work of Jesus. And all that blood shed. And the sacrifice offered. And his. His right standing. Giving. Don't need that.
- You're fine the way you are. What a traitor. One would be. What a horrid traitor. What a harling. We speak as pleasing God.
- He says. Paul said this to the Galatians. Dear friends. Galatians 1. 10. If anyone comes and preaches.
- Any other gospel. Than we preach. Let him be anathema. Let him be eternally ruined. We speak. Speak.
- As pleasing God. It's important then. To take all this to heart. And.
- [31 : 00] To pray. For the continuance. In our land. Of those who preach the word. In this way. And if we will have it.
- This way. And not another way. Then. That should speak volumes. To us. Of where our interest lies. You've got to use these things. If.
- If you love the gospel. And you would have it. No other way. Then. Come out on the side. Of Jesus Christ. Be bold in him. Because.
- Because. That's the way. The apostle is saying. Should be. We commend ourselves. To everyone's conscience. In the sight of God. We speak.
- And live. As pleasing God. And not men. Sometimes. You know.
- [31 : 56] The fact is. It can be. No other way. For the Christian believer. To speak. And to live. As pleased as God.
- I was visiting. Someone recently. A neighbor. And he had. The brass neck. To call me a bigot. I have a feeling.
- He was trying. To provoke me. Into responding. In a hostile way. So I asked him. What he meant. By that. And how did he. Think about a bigot. And I worked him round. To see what a bigot.
- Really is. And you can. Work out. For yourselves. Who the bigot. Actually. Was. We speak.
- As pleasing. God. And not men. We are living. In a day. When the gospel. Of the Lord. Jesus Christ. Is.
- [32 : 57] Resented. By those. Who believe it not. They want. It their own. They want. To be.
- As right. As. Gospel. Living people. And believe. What they like. Bible. Says. That's believing. A lie. Let us.
- Learn. From the apostle. To commend. Ourselves. To every man's. Conscience. In the sight of God. By what we say.
- In commending. Jesus. And by what we do. In commending. Him too. Amen.