

Paul's Threefold Defence

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- [0 : 00] Well, now we're going to turn to 1 Thessalonians 2, and we'll continue in our study here. We'll just read verses 1 to 6. For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we had suffered before, and were spitefully or shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold enough, 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 were approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God as witness, nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.
- [1 : 25] Our text today is found in verses 5 and 6a, the first part of it, down to either from you or from others. And what I want to do with this is to think about it in terms of Paul's threefold defense of genuine preachers of Christ. Paul's threefold defense of genuine preachers of Christ. Now, Paul deemed this necessary. It was a harsh reality to him, and he felt under the constraints of God to set forth a threefold defense in this way. In the evenings, if I can just digress for a moment by way of introduction, we've been studying the life of Elijah the prophet.
- [2 : 27] And Elijah functioned at a time when King Ahab ruled in Israel, the ten tribes, and Jehoshaphat looked after what was called Judah, the two tribes together. And Ahab was a particularly wicked and idolatrous king. And in 2 Chronicles 18 and verse 7, he responds to a request from Jehoshaphat. Do you have another prophet, a prophet of the Lord, among you? Ahab had got a raft of false prophets to tell Jehoshaphat what Ahab wanted Jehoshaphat to hear. And when he had to admit to Jehoshaphat there was one true prophet, not that he called him true, well, he said there is another, and his name is Micaiah. But I don't want him to speak a word, I hate him. Because he never says anything good about me. He only prophesies bad things to me.
- [3 : 40] And you know, all too often in the history of Israel, that's exactly the way it was. The true and faithful prophets of God were resented and they were hated by the people. Because they told the people the truth. They gave them the message that God wanted to give. Their burden was, this is what the Lord says.

In the old authorized version it was, this says the Lord. That was the mark of their preaching. I will tell you what the Lord says in his word to me.

And so at times they had to defend themselves from false allegations made against them. And this is exactly what Paul is doing here to the Thessalonians.

He persists. We looked last time at something similar to this. On how he appeals to their knowledge of his words and conduct and that of his fellow missionaries.

[4 : 48] Now here he develops it on and he gives this threefold defense of himself and of all genuine preachers of Christ.

And whilst it's true that we can't spend our lives defending ourselves against those who malign our character and falsely accuse us.

Nevertheless, there are times when we're bound to say something. Paul did just that and he's doing it again here in this threefold defense of his own genuineness as a servant of Christ and that of his fellow missionaries.

And I want us just to consider this and learn a few things from the points he makes. There are actually three I want to address. First of all, Paul rejects the charge of flattery.

He rejects the charge of flattery. For neither at any time did we use flattering words. Actually, if you look at the words that are used in the Old Testament and the New for flattery, there are not many.

[6 : 10] There are one or two in the Old Testament. Then there's only one of its kind in the New Testament and it's here in 1 Thessalonians 5. That doesn't mean there's not much said in the Bible about flattery.

There's actually a lot said, particularly in the Old Testament, which forms a base for our understanding about the ills of flattery.

And here, as indeed in the Old Testament, flattery is regarded as ruinous to people.

It is ruinous to those who are duped by the flatterer, whether it's a male or a female. Indeed, let me take you back for a moment to the dawn of human history.

And let me take you into the garden and the work of that old serpent, the devil. And let me suggest to you that it was through flattery he deceived our first parents.

[7 : 20] Yes, he flattered them. He insinuated that they would be so much better off if they would just taste and see.

Take the fruit that God's forbidden you. He doesn't really want you to get into what he knows. And if you do it, you'll be so much better.

You'll be just like him in wisdom and knowledge and what grand people you'll be. And so, by flattering them, he beguiled, that's the word, he bewitched them.

He brought them into disobeying God. And the Old Testament has a lot to say about this principle of the chief of the flatterers, the deceiver.

Those who, therefore, will do us most harm, flatter us. Now, that's a serious thing. And I suspect we don't think enough about it as a serious problem.

[8 : 35] To be a flatterer or to be flattered. The trouble is, you see, that when we hear nice things said about us, we switch on.

We intensify our concentration. We like to be flattered. We like to hear nice, smooth, sound things said about us.

They've got a lovely ring in our ears. And they're like sweet music to our minds. And we're almost seduced by what we hear.

It's a problem. It is a problem. And as we said by way of introduction, in the days gone by in Israel's history, the true prophets had this against them.

They didn't flatter the people. The false prophets were flatterers through and through. They were the majority. And the people loved them.

[9 : 41] Because the people tickled their fancy. They spoke in a way that they liked. They responded to. Oh well, I'm not so bad after all. A wee bit of spit and polish here and there.

And I'll be okay. They flattered the people. They said, peace. It's okay. Everything's fine. And there was no peace.

They said, a tweak here and a tweak there in your life. You'll be alright. Don't worry. All is well. And this in fact was a great lie.

It was flattery of the worst kind. But the sad thing is, the Israelites loved to be flattered by the false prophets.

I hate Micaiah, said Ahab. For he never says anything good about me. The false prophets said to the people when the Assyrians came, and later when the Chaldeans and the Babylonians came, it's alright, the Lord's among us.

[10 : 55] The truth is the Lord forsook them. Jeremiah told them. He warned them and warned them. And they didn't listen to him. But the false prophets told them, the Lord is among us.

Jeremiah said, the Lord has forsaken us because we have forsaken him. And Paul is concerned here, you see, to make this point.

Look here, he's saying to them, you just listen and weigh what you saw and heard. We didn't use flattering words.

We weren't flatterers. As you know. In reflecting on this and studying around it, I came across an interesting quotation by Charles Bridges, and he quotes from Homer's Iliad.

And he, of course, puts into his hero's heart to regard flattery personified as a fiend from hell.

[12 : 07] That's how we are to view flattery and the flatterer. And that takes us back to what I was saying earlier on.

It finds its root in that old serpent, the devil. In Proverbs 26, 28, we read these words, the flattering tongue works the ruin of the world.

So, you see, the point I'm making here, this first point, Paul rejects the charge of flattery. To Paul, it was a profoundly serious allegation against him and his fellow missionaries.

He insists, he stresses, that they did not use flattery at all. They didn't seek to flatter the Thessalonians.

Rather, they used great plainness of speech and spoke the truth in them. I don't know, did you hear, there was an interview on the radio, Matthew Paris was speaking about Maggie Thatcher.

[13 : 25] and he had worked for her, of course, in a certain capacity and he was talking about how she was no flatterer and how she used her words to cut any opposition to her to pieces and how she could demolish with a word and humiliate, I think he referred to Geoffrey Howe in particular, how her words minced him, humiliated him was the word he used.

Now, when Paul says we use great plainness of speech, it's not the plainness of speech, the brutal, cruel speech of somebody like Maggie Thatcher, but of a servant of God speaking the truth in land.

Just a wee aside, I often wonder, in fact, we were saying recently, some of the old preachers, you know, in days gone by, they said some pretty brutal things to folk from the pulpit.

Maybe they took a bit of advantage. But the important thing to notice here is no flattery, great plainness of speech involves speaking the truth in Christ in a living and caring way.

What we do, what we endeavour to do, is to lay the sinner low in the dust, to bring him down in his own estimation of himself or herself, and from that lowly position in the dust, as it were, to get a sight of Christ crucified that will make that person fall in love with Jesus and say, He is my Saviour.

[15 : 20] That's what we are about. So, my dear friends, we are to learn to hate flattery and to shun the practice and mean what you say and say what you mean.

Don't be a flatterer. So, Paul rejects the charge of flattery. The second thing Paul rejects is the charge of covetousness.

You see, he says there, nor a cloak of covetousness or for covetousness. God is witness.

And what's happening here is that those who tried to discredit Paul and his fellow missionaries in Thessalonica suggested that they were really in this business of telling this message about Jesus because they were covetous, they were greedy men.

That's really why Paul says, nor did we use a cloak of covetousness. What was being said amounted to this.

[16 : 31] They came in and they were using evangelism or preaching the gospel of Christ as a cloak to conceal their real reason for being there.

And it's like as if the gospel and the evangelistic message was just a front for covetousness. A pretext for greed is how one Greek scholar translates this.

Something woven up front to conceal or to disguise their real intention. And Paul says we did not use the gospel in that way.

We didn't come with that. And my dear friends, any well informed and spirit taught Christian believer should know and understand the serious and dreadful nature of covetousness.

Paul himself when an expert in the law of God able to teach others did not see the dreadful nature of covetousness and he had no idea that he himself Saul of Tarsus that scholarly man was a covetous man.

[17 : 59] He didn't see it. And you know we know that we can say that emphatically because you know what does the bible say? He told us himself.

I didn't realize that I, Saul of Tarsus, Paul the Apostle, was actually a covetous man, an idolater.

Though I was an expert in the law of Moses and the writings of the fathers, I didn't see. It was only when God's spirit convicted me personally of sin did I realize that the very core sin that kept me from Christ was I was covetous.

I idolized myself. I was hopelessly lost in covetousness. If you turn up Romans chapter 7 and verse 7 he tells us that I had not known sin but that the law said you shall not covet.

And it was only when light from God the spirit of God convicted him that he suddenly realized I'm a covetous man. I'm no better than an idolater.

[19 : 18] I've enthroned my own views in my heart. I am full of self-interest. And my dear friends while we can't judge the motives of others let's beware for ourselves of covetousness in our own hearts and never use professing to be a Christian as a cloak for covetousness for greediness.

You see Paul calls God to be his infallible witness. God is my witness on this. I didn't come to you as a covetous greedy man.

The last thing then we want to consider is Paul rejects the charge of glory seeking. verse 6a nor did we seek glory from men either from you or from others.

Same thing was said about him in Corinth. We reject the charge of glory seeking.

glory and by this is meant seeking glory from men in a way that we almost bask in the glory that people heap upon us.

[20 : 53] That's the idea. And it's interesting that although this is not exclusively a Jewish sin it was a sin that Jesus pinpointed in the Jewish leaders.

You find in John chapter 5 from verse 41 Jesus deals with this very issue. And you know as you study the life of the Savior one of the intriguing and humbling things about him is although he was even in this world as man he continued to be the Lord of glory of glory but he never sought glory from men he never did.

And he took issue with the Jewish leaders that that was their stumbling block they sought the glory of men.

He could say to them you prefer to be honored by men rather than God and if you look in that section from verse 41 onward you'll see what I'm saying verse 44 says you prefer to be honored by men rather than God what is Jesus saying here and when we've answered the question what's Jesus saying to these Jews we'll understand why Paul is rejecting the charge that we sought glory from men what is Jesus saying he says this how can you believe who receive glory or praise from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God and there's a deliberateness there in saying the only God because glory seekers deify themselves they deify themselves and in a word they make a

God of their own position of their own intellectual powers and prowess and Jesus you see nailed that down that was the problem with these Jewish scholars it's the problem with other scholars too let me say it in the 21st century they sought fame and praise by seeking to become intellectual giants and known like that they desired to be known as big authorities in the world of scholarship and most of you here today are old enough to have watched the development of the experts syndrome that's what I call it anyway of the experts syndrome in the media go to the BBC news and you're guaranteed when they want an opinion it used to be some highly qualified doctor then they moved up the chain a bit further to consultants and now you must have a professor that whole syndrome is abroad today that you must have this great intellectual standing and therefore you're qualified to speak this is something that was actually a snare to the

[24 : 41] Jewish authorities now mark what I say mark carefully if you go away from here thinking he's downing scholarship and learning you're wrong it's our attitude and our heart to it that's what Jesus nailed as glory seeking it's projecting yourself through that medium of scholarship of expertise that's the problem you receive glory from one another and you're not concerned to receive glory from God that's the issue and we are living today more than ever before in a world where people are pushed on to attain to expertise and intellectual power and prowess but

I came across an interesting footnote Liam Morris was an Anglican scholar yes I underscore that he was a scholar he was a principal of Moore College in Australia and a superb expositor of the word of God and writer on theological subjects and Liam Morris quotes a writer called Mansfield and he says this and it should serve as a warning to you and me trained men's minds are spread so thin they let all sorts of darkness in whatever light man finds they doubt it they live not light but talk about it well

I say that again it's useful it hits the nail on the head trained men's minds are spread so thin whatever light man finds they doubt it they live not light but talk about it and why do they let all darkness in because of the bread of their learning they're letting darkness in and they have little light in them and less to offer friends let us be as Jesus said we should be let us be as little children in understanding and as spiritually blind needing sight from the

Christ of God Paul rejects the charge that they were glory seekers let's be like little children on this great matter of true light from God let's not talk about it with all that we've acquired by way of knowledge but let's be like little children asking the Lord teach me Charlotte Elliot's words just as I am poor wretched blind sight riches healing for the mind yea all I need in you to find O Lamb of God I can let's not glory in men let's not seek glory from men let's glory in the

Lord and seek for ourselves spiritual sight and riches and healing yea all I need in need to find O Lamb of God I come Paul said it this way to the Galatians where we were reading God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ Christ and so then to finish let us shen flattery and vehemently resist covetousness and glory only in the Lord and then at last by his own divine grace we will receive from him a crown of glory

[30 : 15] Amen