



## **Keys to a Ministry That's Not in Vain**

*1 Thessalonians 2:1-16*

**A ministry that's not in vain is a ministry empowered and approved by God (1-8).** -  
*Boldness for the work of the gospel comes from God, so depend on God (2).* - *Approval for the work of the gospel comes from God, so work to please God (3-8).* - *Don't work to get something from those you serve (5-6).*

- *Work to give something to those you serve (7-8):*

- *The gospel (8), and*

- *Yourself (8).*

Paul's defense or review of his ministry is instructive. He was not only reminding them of how he conducted himself when he was with them, but he was providing them – and us today – a model of the work of the gospel. He was encouraging them to continue to follow his example, and that example came from a heart that desired that his ministry would not be in vain. Paul made it clear that a ministry that's not in vain is a ministry empowered and approved by God. Coming out of being thrown in prison in Philippi, Paul didn't let that discourage him or make him cautious to share the gospel in Thessalonica. Rather, depending on God, Paul relied on the power of God to continue to proclaim the gospel with all boldness to the Thessalonians. They knew this. They were witnesses to Paul's work there. Just as importantly, Paul knew that he was approved for the work of the gospel not by man but by the Lord. It was God's grace and calling that approved Paul, and so Paul made it his mission to work as unto the Lord and not man. Since approval for the work of the gospel came from God, Paul wanted to work to please God! He didn't work to get something from those he served through manipulation or deceit. Rather, he worked to give something to those he served, which was first and foremost the gospel and then himself. What a beautiful model for gospel ministry still today! While this certainly applies to the work of elders in a local church and missionaries on the field, it also applies to every believer who is faithful to live as a faithful witness, standing fast in the Lord to share Jesus. *God, protect our ministries such that they would not be in vain!*

1. How does God give us boldness to be witnesses for Jesus? Have you ever experienced this? Are you relying on yourself (preparation, presentation, having all the answers, etc.) or God when it comes to simply sharing your faith and life in Jesus? If so, why are these insufficient? What do you need to do? How do we depend on God for boldness?
2. Who saved you from your sin? Who gifted you for service in God's Kingdom? In other words, who has approved you for service to the Lord? Are you working to please God or man? If man, why? What are the dangers and temptations of working to please man? What are the benefits and blessings of working to please God?
3. Why is giving the gospel and yourself so important? What's the danger of giving the gospel but not yourself? Is this a risk in today's culture of online religious "influencers?" Discuss.

**A ministry that's worth remembering is a ministry that labors and toils in the gospel (9-12).** -

*Work to not be a burden when support would be a burden on the church (9).* - *Live to model the very gospel that you proclaim (10).*

- *Love enough to call others to walk in a manner worthy as those called by God (11-12).* Paul's example in Thessalonica continued to instruct the church on the work of the gospel. His goal wasn't to get something from the church, but his goal was to give something to the church: The gospel and himself.



# STANDING FAST IN THE LORD

In a context where there is no church, Paul had to work outside of the church to support his ministry. He did this often where needed. The church was small and believers were infants in their faith and life in Christ. Asking them to provide Paul with all he needed to live would have been a burden on the young and small church in Thessalonica. Therefore, Paul worked to not be a burden when support would be a burden on the church. This is still a model for missions where the church is small and young, and it's still a model for labor in the church where resources are few and the church is small. It's a beautiful picture of a heart for doing what it takes to bring the gospel to where it's needed. Paul also lived to model the very gospel that he proclaimed. This is critical to a ministry that's worth remembering. Paul was sharing what he had received. He was living the life in Christ that was his by God's grace. He wasn't acting or putting on a show. His conduct was a faithful witness to the validity of the gospel that he proclaimed, and as a result, he had the testimony that brought authority to his call for others to imitate him as he imitated the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wanted to please the Lord, so he didn't shy away from calling those he disciplined to live in a manner that was worthy of the Lord! He knew that God had called the Thessalonian believers into his kingdom and glory, so Paul called on them to faithfully live out God's call! *God, help us live in a manner worthy of your calling in Christ Jesus!*

1. In our context, how do we help support missionaries who would be a financial burden on the small and young churches that they help to plant overseas? How do we help support the training of pastors and leaders in a way that doesn't burden poor and small churches overseas? Is this God's plan for every church in supporting its leaders? Why, or why not?
2. Does your life model the gospel you proclaim? Does it display a life of repentance and faith? Encourage one another and pray for one another to live in a way that models Jesus! 3. How does love equate to calling and challenging others to live in a manner worthy of God's calling? Does today's culture encourage or discourage living for Christ and calling others to do the same?

## **Give thanks when the Word is received for what it is: God's Word (13-16). -**

*True faith perseveres in every generation (14-16).*

*- God's wrath will come on those who reject Jesus (16).*

Finally, Paul thanked the Lord that the Thessalonian church had received his Word as what it is: God's Word! It was the very Word of God that was at work in their lives, growing them in Christ and empowering them for the work of Christ. This is something to be thankful for in every generation of the church, and it's important to remember that every generation of the church faces challenges that test perseverance. Paul gave the example of the Jewish church to remind the Thessalonians that they were not alone. This example also encouraged the Thessalonians in the fact that by God's grace true faith perseveres in every generation. The Lord will protect and preserve the faith of his children, and he will also faithfully pour out his wrath on his enemies: Those who continue to reject Jesus. This was encouragement as well for a church that faced persecution and needed perseverance. God's justice cannot be escaped. His wrath came on his Son on the cross so that all who trust in Jesus can be delivered from his wrath through Jesus, but his wrath will come on all who reject the Son of God who bore the wrath of God for our sin. *God, lead sinners to receive your Word for what it is: God's Word!*

1. Have you received the Word for what it is: God's Word? What's the evidence that you've done in your heart? Is God's Word at work in you? How?
2. Pray for God's mercy and for repentance and faith for those who are enemies of Jesus!