

2:1–3:13 is the next major section in the book.

In order to understand chapters 2 and 3 we need to remember the historical situation in which the letter to the Thessalonians was written. Paul and Silas had preached the gospel at the synagogue in Thessalonica for three weeks and people had come to faith. However, hostility against them surfaced immediately and they were forced to leave under the cover of darkness (Acts 17; see my notes on 1 Thess. 1).

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 Paul appears to be defending his character and ministry. The only intelligible suggestion is that his “enemies were attempting to destroy the faith of the Thessalonians by undermining their confidence in the integrity of the men from whom they had received the gospel” (Hiebert, 77). So in 2:1–16 Paul defends his conduct and in 2:17–3:13 he explains why he departed from them and expresses his determination to visit them again.

However, we should also keep in mind that ancient letters were sometimes written in such a way that through narrative, role models were given to provide an example of proper moral behavior (Wanamaker, 91). Whether this is specifically intended or not, Paul’s devotion to Christ as revealed in chapters 2 and 3 provides a picture of what the life of a committed believer looks like; this should inspire us in our own commitment to Christ (see notes on 1 Thess. 1:6).

**2:1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,  
2:2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had  
the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.**

Verse 1 begins with “for,” linking what follows to chapter 1. The “for” completes the thoughts found in 1:5 and 9.

In Greek, 1:9 and 2:1 share the common thought of Paul’s *coming to the Thessalonians* (1:9—εἰσοδον . . . πρὸς ὑμᾶς [translated as “our reception among you”]; 2:1—εἰσοδον . . . πρὸς ὑμᾶς [translated as “our coming to you”]). The difference between 1:9 and 2:1 is that in 1:9 Paul had spoken about *the second-hand knowledge that others had* about his coming to Thessalonica while in 2:1 he speaks of the *firsthand* knowledge of the Thessalonians. Paul uses the Thessalonians’ own recollection of his coming to defend himself; “*you yourselves know*” (of the coming we had among you)—that it “was not in vain.”

Paul had also pointed out to the Thessalonians in 1:5 that they *knew* what kind of men Paul and his companions had proven to be. Chapter 2 elaborates upon what kind of men they were. Thus, “for” also forms a link to 1:5 as well.

The word “but” (ἀλλὰ—*alla*) at the beginning of verse 2 is a strong adversative in Greek and shows that a contrast between verses 1 and 2 is intended. When verses 1 and 2 are taken together as a complete thought, it appears that Paul is saying that his purpose in coming to Thessalonica was to preach the gospel (2:2), and he achieved that purpose (that is, his trip was not in vain; 2:1; Stott, 47); Paul did exactly what he intended to do—he preached the gospel boldly (2:2).

According to Acts 16:19–24, 35–39 Paul and Silas had come to Thessalonica after being publically humiliated (mistreated, insulted; 2:2a) by being beaten with rods in Philippi. They had also been thrown into jail, even though they were Roman citizens. When they arrived in Thessalonica, the open wounds and bruises on their backs testified of the ordeal they had endured. Their experience in Philippi might have hindered *their purpose in coming* to Thessalonica, diminishing their evangelistic fervor or even causing them to stop preaching altogether out of fear. But it had not.

In 2:1–2 Paul wants his readers to recall that he and his companions came to Thessalonica preaching the gospel *with boldness* in the midst of much opposition (2:2b; 1:5). Verse 2 underscores how amazing their boldness was in declaring the gospel to the Thessalonians and demonstrates that they were not preaching for personal gain but with deep conviction and concern for those to whom they ministered.

In short, in verses 1 and 2, Paul lets the facts about his coming, still fresh in the Thessalonians' memory, stand as his defense against allegations that were being leveled against him. They only needed to recall what they witnessed to know that the accusations against him and his companions were false (a call to remember is used often in the letters to Thessalonica—1:5; 3:3,4; 4:2; 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:5–6; 3:7). Paul had gone to Thessalonica to preach the gospel, and that is what he did. His mission to preach the gospel was not in vain (2:1); his purpose for going to Thessalonica was not a failure; on the contrary (“but” 2:2), not only did he preach, he preached with boldness in the midst of opposition.

It is important to note that throughout this letter Paul directs the glory to God. In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul saw God as the source of the life of the church. In 1:2–3 he thanked God for the grace He manifested in the Thessalonians' lives. In 1:4 God was glorified as the source of their salvation (see my notes on these verses). Now in 2:2 he sees his boldness to preach as being “in God” (ἐν τῷ θεῷ is instrumental, indicating source; as ἐν θεῷ did in 1:1; Wanamaker, 92; Hiebert, 82). That is, he sees God as the source of his boldness.

Paul is a role model for us. His life and his conscious awareness of God's working remind us that nothing comes from our own strength; everything finds its source in God. By being conscious that our boldness is “in God” we can find the strength to proclaim Christ even in the midst of opposition and insult. And then, by verbalizing that God is the source of it, we give glory to God.

**2:3 For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit;**

**2:4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.**

Verses 2 and 3 are connected by the word “for”; verse 3 expands upon why Paul and the others were able to preach the gospel boldly (Wanamaker, 94): “we had the boldness in our God. . . to speak to you the gospel of God . . . for our exhortation (that is, their proclamation of the gospel) does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit.”

The word “exhortation” (2:3) may better be translated as “appeal,” for it refers to Paul's appeal to believe the gospel (the same word is used in 2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1).

Paul spoke boldly because he was confident that the message was not false (it did “not come from error”—2:3) because it was not something he thought up himself; it was something that was entrusted to him (2:4). The idea of being entrusted with something is usually used in relation to stewardship; a steward is entrusted with property that he doesn’t own but only manages. The gospel was not Paul’s to manipulate as he pleased to suit the receptivity of the audience. Paul just managed what was given to him. This expresses Paul’s sense of accountability to the gospel and explains why he doesn’t proclaim the gospel in a way that pleases men. Paul had no need to trick or deceive people (2:3) for he wasn’t trying to please men, but God (2:4).

The word “pleasing” in Greek also included the idea of action, of serving. Paul served men, but he never *just* served men. Outward behavior was not enough to please God; he served knowing that God sees the heart and it is ultimately Him who Paul desired to please.

He was also confident that his message didn’t spring from impure motives (2:3), for he was approved by God (2:4).

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In verses 5 to 8 Paul continues prodding the Thessalonians to recall his conduct as an apologetic to refute the slanderous insinuations leveled against him and his companions. He first states what his conduct was *not* like in verses 5 and 6, and then gives a positive description of it in verses 7 and 8

#### **What Paul’s conduct was not like—verses 5–6.**

***2:5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed-- God is witness--***

***2:6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.***

The “for” that begins verse 5 takes up the thought in verses 3 and 4. What was true of their conduct as Christian preachers in general (2:3, 4) was true of them at Thessalonica, as well (2:5ff; Morris, 73). That is, as men approved by God and entrusted with the gospel they did not speak in a way that tried to please men, but in a way that pleased God.

From Paul’s defensive tone in verses 5–8 we can assume that some were accusing Paul of being manipulative, preaching for financial gain and personal glory. By discrediting him, his accusers hoped that the Thessalonians would reject the gospel that he had preached to them. Paul categorically denies such accusations and appeals to their own experience with him (“as you know”—2:5) as proof that he had come to them with pure motives.

In preaching the gospel, Paul insists that:

He did not use flattery. (2:5)

He was not motivated by greed. (2:5)

He was not seeking praise from man. (2:6)

He did not use his authority as an apostle to demand privileges or compensation for the message that he brought. (2:6)

Instead,

He was gentle like a mother caring for her children. (2:7)

He gave himself to minister to them. (2:8)

Paul was confident that they, having heard him proclaim the gospel, would know that he did not stoop to using flattery (2:5). In English, flattery can be saying something to make someone feel good even though the comment is insincere. Flattery, in Greek, denotes saying nice things to gain influence over other people for selfish reasons. It was used by orators to leave a favorable impression in order to gain influence over others for personal advantage. Paul denies using any such tactics.

Secondly, he rejects the idea that his behavior was motivated by greed. Paul insists that he did not put on a mask to cover greed. The idea behind the expression of wearing a cloak or mask is that of putting something up to cover or to conceal what lies behind it. Paul did not proclaim the gospel as a pretext to conceal covetousness. Since only God can see one's motives, Paul appeals to God as a witness to the truthfulness of his words.

The third denial concerns seeking glory from man. Many people act as they do to be praised by others. The missionaries have not used their preaching to gain honor, recognition, and approval of others. Their desire was that those who heard benefited.

Lastly, as an apostle of Christ, Paul did not impose his authority even though he had the right to do so. The word "apostles" includes Paul's colleagues, Silas and Timothy, but here we must assume that it is used in the broader sense of a messenger or envoy—Timothy and Silas were not on par with the Twelve and Paul who had unique qualifications (see my notes on "apostle").

#### **What Paul's conduct was like—verses 7–8.**

***2:7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.***

***2:8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.***

Grammatically, the first part of verse 7 goes with verse 6 and completes the thought: as apostles, they could have asserted their authority (2:6), but they didn't (2:7), rather, they proved to be gentle instead.

Paul likens his gentleness to that of a nursing mother who tenderly cares for her own children. This forcefully underscores the legitimacy of Paul's missionary methods. It is difficult to come up with an image of gentleness that exceeds that of a mother nursing her own baby. The Thessalonians knew that they were not harsh or high-handed. They had tenderness and devotion, fostering and protecting those under their care

Verse 8 tells how their gentle treatment showed itself; they didn't just share the gospel but they shared their whole lives. "Lives" is literally "souls," that is, their whole person; the expression sums up the innermost man.

The fact that they were "well-pleased" to impart their lives to them indicates that they were acting freely and out of a deliberate choice. Furthermore, note that Paul didn't say, "we *would have been* well-pleased to impart . . ." but simply, "we *were* well-pleased to impart. . ." This emphasizes that he wasn't just talking about what he was contemplating, but what he actually did. The verb "impart" is the imperfect tense (a past tense of continuous action) that suggests that the giving of themselves was not something that happened every now and then; their behavior was continual.

The missionaries went beyond their official duty. They not only imparted the gospel, but also their own souls. The careful manner in which this verse is crafted shows that the people in Thessalonica were dear to the missionary band.

***2:9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.***

Verse 9 recalls the long hours of extreme toil and hardship by which the missionaries supported themselves while preaching.

Part of Jewish upbringing was learning a trade and Paul was no exception to this. Paul had probably learned tent making (Acts 18:3). He and Silas had received some financial help from the Philippian church while they were in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:15, 16), but not enough to allow Paul to stop working. By his around-the-clock diligence, Paul was able to lift the burden of support from those in Thessalonica. His purpose in going to them was to give them the gospel and he wanted nothing to distract from that.

Paul describes his work as labor and hardship. "Labor" may better be translated as "toil" for the word emphasizes the fatigue they incurred in expending themselves. "Hardship" highlights the external difficulties they encountered in the process of working. As in 2 Thessalonians 3:8, the combination describes the apostles' efforts at providing their own upkeep.

Paul's reasoning in verses 6–8 is similar to his reasoning in verse 9. In verses 6–8 Paul said that he had the right to exercise his authority, although he didn't do so; he was instead gentle. In verse 9 the implication is that he also had the right to receive compensation for his work in proclaiming the gospel, for "the laborer is worthy of his wages" (1 Tim. 5:18), but he didn't exercise that right either. Instead, he chose to work hard, day and night, so that he didn't burden the people he was ministering to. His actions demonstrated the sincerity of his motives. Paul's behavior was evidence that he was not preaching for financial gain as some were evidently saying.

***2:10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;***

***2:11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,***

***2:12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.***

Verse 10 forms a summary statement for what has been previously asserted in detail. Three adverbs are used to summarize Paul and his companion's behavior: they behaved devoutly, uprightly, and blamelessly.

Devoutly means piously or religiously and points to the inner disposition which gives regard to the sanctity of every part of life. Righteously describes conduct that comes up to the full standard of what is right or just. Both mark the Christian life. Blameless relates to the performance of the duties of life. The word indicates that their conduct was irreproachable; there were no charges that could be maintained against them. In other words, they not only believed the gospel, they also "behaved it." They conducted themselves with fidelity in the word and in deed toward those to whom they ministered (Hiebert, 101).

The general assertion concerning their conduct in verse 10 is supported with specific evidence in verses 11 and 12.

Once again, Paul appeals to the knowledge of the readers ("you know") to confirm the virtuous character of the lives of the missionaries while they were in Thessalonica.

In verse 11 the nature of their work was fatherly. Fathers especially had the educational role and set the example for their children. As a father to the Thessalonians he urged them to live in a manner worthy of God and his kingdom which is present and future.

Three elements of training and instruction come out in verse 11: exhorting, encouraging, and imploring. The present tenses of these participles show that their activities in these areas were a continual practice.

The goal of Paul's conduct and ministry is expressed in verse 12—that they should walk worthily of God.

The word "walk," of course, is a common figure of speech to denote moral conduct. The God of whom they were to walk worthily is described as "the One who calls us into His own kingdom and glory." Once again God is glorified in the recognition that the Thessalonian believers are the recipients of God's call. "In this text a close link exists between Christian demeanor and future salvation. . . Paul understood the behavior that he demanded of his converts as a response to God's offer of salvation" (Wanamaker, 107).

The kingdom and God's glory will be manifested in all their fullness when Christ comes again. Believers are now members of the kingdom, but are only receiving a foretaste of the glory that is to come. However, when Paul says that God is "the one who calls," he uses the present participle "to reflect the fact that Christians are continually called into God's own dominion and glory, just as they must continually strive to live their lives as servants of God" (Wanamaker, 107).